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LAURA, AFTERWARDS DUCHESSE D'ABRANTÈS, IN HER WEDDING DRESS

(*Frontispiece*)

The Secret Memoirs

of

THE DUCHESSE D'ABRANTÈS

1784–1838

edited by

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translated from the French by

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LONDON

FIRST PUBLISHED IN MCMXXVII
MADE & PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
BY BUTLER & TANNER LTD
FROME AND
LONDON

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A2-84C

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Translator's Preface

LAURA DE PERMON, Duchesse d'Abrantès, heroine of the passionate romance that has been brought to light for the first time in the following pages, was born at Montpellier in 1784. Her father, Martin Permon (the 'de' appeared later, was some sort of contractor to the Government: her mother, of mixed Greek and Corsican race, claimed to be descended from the Imperial family of the Comneni who occupied the throne at Constantinople in the twelfth century, and subsequently founded the romantic Empire of Trebizond. The Permon fortunes were ruined by the Revolution: the father died: but the mother continued to lead a precarious though lively existence in Paris for a number of years.

She maintained something of a salon in which the Corsican refugees were very prominent and the Bonaparte family were assiduous members of the circle. Napoleon's fidelity to his friends, particularly to those of his early struggles, was one of the strongest elements in his character, and the Permon fortunes rose with his own. In 1800, when he was First Consul, Laura was married to Junot, his Aide-de-Camp and Military Governor of Paris. A French Historian thus describes Junot, the dashing Colonel of Hussars: 'a soldier first of all, and a violent and even brutal soldier too: his quarrelsome temper never left him save at the actual moment of attack: he was often turbulent and insubordinate, and reckless in the pursuit of adventure. Bonaparte was deeply attached to his comrade in arms, whose fortune he had made, but he was anxious to turn him into something a little more civilized and self-

controlled, and hoped that marriage might have this effect.'

It appears that he was at first doubtful of Laura's capacity for this formidable task, but his consent was finally obtained.

The achievement was probably beyond any woman, and the ménage, as might have been anticipated, was hardly a peaceful one. Junot was a slave to the opposite sex, and in those brilliant years he was the hero of many adventures: and Laura was not slow to console herself. Her most important affair was with Metternich, while he was Austrian ambassador in Paris from 1806 to 1809. Junot's explosion of wrath on learning of this liaison caused so prodigious a scandal, that the Emperor had to take notice of it, for he was always anxious for the decorum of his somewhat parvenu régime. Indeed Junot's increasing incompetence, and his Duchess's unbridled extravagance of life and demeanour, began to bring the pair into something like disfavour: but Napoleon was the most faithful of masters, and though he could never bring himself to give Junot a Marshal's bâton, notwithstanding his failures in Portugal he gave him a command in the Grand Army. It was during his absence in Russia, that Laura met Maurice de Balincourt, and their passionate love story is the main theme of the narrative and letters that follow.

It is a moving drama of love and jealousy, darkened by the madness and tragic end of Junot, and played out against the background of a falling Empire. Laura was an exacting mistress, racked and infuriated by jealousy, capable and indeed guilty of a thousand extravagances, but as we see her now, most vividly and loveably alive. Maurice de Balincourt undoubtedly inspired the deepest affection that the

Duchess had ever felt or ever was to feel for any man. Him we are asked to look upon as a very perfect gentle knight. He appears, indeed, to have been a cultivated and accomplished aristocrat, of extreme personal beauty, but rather too much of a *Jeune Premier* for our taste. He seems out of place in the heroic age of France, too easily satisfied to hang about ladies' drawing-rooms, while the armies of the Emperor were thundering through the Germanies. It is true he was a Royalist and, like many of his class, to be regarded as merely tolerating the Imperial régime: but he seems to have been very ready to accept some sort of Court appointment about the Household of the Queen of Spain, the wife of Joseph Bonaparte.

As a lover he was certainly not above reproach, though it is true that after the collapse of the Duchess's fortunes, upon the death of her husband, he behaved with very real generosity, and seriously damaged his own estate in fruitless attempts to assist her. It must also be remembered that, as his letters have not been preserved, we have only the Duchess's side of the story: and her vagaries must at times have been such as to be beyond any man's endurance, or even fidelity. Still it seems clear that when she had made up her mind she was faithful, whereas he most certainly was not.

The liaison lasted until about 1820 when Maurice's patience and resources were wellnigh exhausted. Laura's liabilities at Junot's death amounted to considerably more than a million francs: neither she nor her family were capable of dealing with the situation, and she appeared content to live on Maurice's money in her usual lavish manner: finally one of his family estates had to be sold. Things could go on no longer: a rupture was inevitable, and Laura, notwith-

standing her natural bitterness and grief, appears to have accepted it with dignity and resignation. She retired into the country, and in her distressed circumstances bethought herself of earning money by her pen. She made the acquaintance of Balzac who, during her stay at Versailles, had been her near neighbour at Villeparisis, and, with his assistance and encouragement, composed her voluminous Memoirs and Reminiscences.

She was heedless and reckless as ever, incapable of understanding the management of money, but in these last years of her life it is impossible not to admire the courage and high spirits with which she faced her misfortunes. She made a place for herself under the new régime, and became an esteemed and popular figure in literary circles where she always inspired the awe due to one who had teased the young Lieutenant Bonaparte of the Artillery and met the Emperor Napoleon upon equal terms.

But the struggle was too terrible, and she died in 1838, worn out and practically hunted to death by her creditors, in a mean hospital in a Paris suburb, at the age of fifty-three.

Maurice lived to a green old age in his Château in Provence, a model country gentleman, full of piety and good works. He had, no doubt, been sorely-tried, and could have done none otherwise: but pious Aeneas must always provoke a faint smile, and it is the image of the turbulent and passionate Duchess that remains in our minds.

ERIC SUTTON

THE SECRET MEMOIRS OF THE DUCHESSE D'ABRANTÈS

Foreword

LATE in his career, Metternich drew two pen-portraits that have remained famous, one of Napoleon and one of Alexander I.

In choosing the French language for his delineation of the two men, one the terror and the other the hope of Austria, the prince-diplomat paid a then quite natural tribute to the language, though its spirit was odious to him: but, more significant still, it is in French that he tries to sing the praises of his mistress, Madame la Duchesse d'Abrantès.

This latter portrait, the most life-like of the three, has been quite unknown until lately. The document is before us now. Metternich wrote it in his own hand on a sheet of English paper, headed with a symbolic hour-glass stamped in relief. The stiff handwriting of the Austrian Chancellor begins abruptly in the middle of the page. The script is clear, neat and regular, and indeed reminds us of the final draft of a treaty.

A novel called *Adèle et Sénange* had dethroned *Paul et Virginie*, and about 1808 all Virginies called themselves Adèle.

"PORTRAIT OF ADÈLE[1]

"Among all the women that I have met with in my life, Adèle is the one that cost me the most time and trouble in

[1] All hitherto unpublished documents are indicated by *double* inverted commas.

attaining an intimate knowledge of her heart and character. Yet she is so natural in every way that, when one knows her better, one is astonished at having found any mystery in her.

"Adèle is young and pretty and generally liked by all who know her. Her features are not regular and I find it hard to say what constitutes the magical charm of her countenance. Perhaps it lies mainly in the perfect harmony of her smile and her expression, which is at once vivacious and tender, while her smile is sweet as well as gay. I have never seen anything so lively as the corners of her mouth, half opened and displaying two rows of dazzlingly white teeth, and nothing more alluring than her look when it rests upon the object of her choice. Her soul is then revealed in her eyes, and Adèle's soul makes the face that expresses it lovely indeed.

"Adèle has wit to an extent quite exceptional in a woman, but it is too biting. I have seldom seen her resist the pleasure of saying something malicious, even about a dear friend, without, however, any alteration of her feelings towards the person in question. She has a good heart and a fine character; although she has strong affections and powerful passions, her natural goodness and generosity are such that these less desirable qualities harm none but herself, and it is her happiness alone that suffers. She is a good mother, a good friend and a good sister. She would do anything for a person she loves, and she has many friends who are sincerely devoted to her, and think more of the woman herself than of her rank and fortune. Adèle has talents, not, of course, up to a professional standard, but such as are suitable in a woman of her station. Whatever she does, she does well and in a way that makes her house more agreeable to visit than any other. She is a good

musician, a wonderful dancer, speaks several languages, and possesses in a rare degree all those little feminine talents that are so agreeable and so essential in daily life. I have never, in any country, seen a woman entertain with such perfection. There is no card play, but she has the art of so arranging her guests that everyone is in congenial company, and of making her conversation so interesting that the evenings spent at her house seem to pass all too quickly.

"If I am to sum up my judgment of Adèle's character, I should say: I have never known a more attractive woman or one more fitted to attract, because she flatters one's heart and one's pride at the same time. But, in my view, she has one fault that spoils all her charm; and that is her coquetry, her desire to please at all costs. It is a fault rather of the head than of the heart, but she will never correct it, unless she meets with someone so much her superior as to be able to dominate her and teach her self-denial. However, this fault does not prevent Adèle being one of those charming and adorable people of whom Nature seems far too grudging, and even with this imperfection, there is not a mother who would not be proud to have her for a daughter, not a man who would not be proud to be her friend, her lover, or her husband."

Twenty years later Balzac, who knew nothing of his panegyric, added some further compliments:

'Madame d'Abrantès saw Napoleon as a young man, unknown and taken up with the ordinary affairs of life: then she saw him grow great and powerful, and spread his name throughout the world. She is to me like some fortunate Being who might come and sit beside me after having lived in heaven with God!'

This fortunate Being, like the Evangelists, wished to give her recollections to the world. She described herself as 'the only person who really knew Napoleon,' and late in life she wrote her memoirs in twenty-eight volumes. Balzac, then a young man, encouraged and helped her, and trained her to her new calling: he was her counsellor and even something more.

For nearly a hundred years this famous gallery has been open. Successive editions, extracts and selections have catalogued the exhibits. Even in our own day historians pillage whole pages from Madame la Duchesse d'Abrantès: but the spring, like her conversation, remains inexhaustible. In the face of rival authors, and in spite of much superfluous matter that is not a little wearisome, her volumes still hold the first place.

'Madame la Duchesse d'Abrantès,' said Frédéric Masson, 'is as discreet when she speaks of herself as she is indiscreet when she speaks of others.' Those who are accustomed to look below the surface had a continual feeling that there was a mystery under this 'discretion.' They guessed that an Abrantès 'affair' would one day be brought to light. She obstinately kept to the rôle of the spectator of marvellous events, and said as little as she could about herself, though she was supposed to be telling the story of her life. In the absence of any enlightenment, the enquirers and the curious gave up their search. This secrecy, this mystery and hesitation, in fact concealed a State secret, of which the existence had never been suspected.

Chance, through the kindness of a friend, has put us in possession of a collection of documents of the very first importance. From the historical point of view they are a revelation.

Notwithstanding everything that has been written or published about Madame d'Abrantès it will be seen that the real adventure of her otherwise adventurous life had to this day been completely unknown. Moreover, the documents that we are about to bring forward throw a new light on certain events which the most extensive researches had never been able to explain. It is well known that Madame d'Abrantès' nose was of a not inconsiderable size: doubtless, had it been shorter the fate of the Empire would have been changed, or at least its duration prolonged.

The custodian of these precious papers waited until a hundred years had passed since the events described before giving them to the world. The secret has been religiously kept and is a remarkable instance of filial piety. Only a regard for historical truth could overcome such laudable delicacy. Many secrets must, indeed, still lie sealed in their envelopes: their revelation would cause too much disturbance.

As we read these unknown documents, the face of Laura d'Abrantès, pale and dying, becomes extraordinarily clear to us. As we turn over the pages we see the little dark-haired lady holding in check the Emperor and his government. At that time she was the prey of a passion the like of which very few human beings can have known. From this source she drew the strength to support her furious resistance to her Master's orders. The effects of her revolt shook the Empire to its very foundations.

The struggle was the beginning of a long drama which lasted several years. Sometimes the shadow of the Emperor falls across the scene. On several occasions he intervenes with violence but always against his will.

Chapter I

LAURA DE PERMON was born on November 6th, 1784. The following pathetic letter gives the hour of her birth. She wrote it on her last birthday.

"6 November 1837.

"Farewell. I will conclude by asking you to pray for me this evening before midnight. It was in that hour that my mother brought me into a life that was to be one of continual suffering. I have had far more sorrow than joy." (Charavay Collection.)

It was her great-great-nephew, Pierre Louys, who discovered the registration of her baptism at Montpellier. His father was called by the not uncommon name of Martin, and was a clerk in the commissariat department: when he had made his fortune he became Martin de Permon, to shake off the dust of his plebeian origin. She claimed to be descended through her mother from the Imperial family of the Comneni. Her mother was a Greek, half Corsican and half princess, and three-quarters adventuress, extremely beautiful, passionate, and headstrong. Laura, who adored her, wrote many years later:

"I saw the Lady of the Balcony[1] yesterday. I can't tell you how joyful my dear friend felt when she embraced me. Indeed I did so too and from the bottom of my heart. Dear

[1] Madame Récamier. At Lyons where she had been exiled by the Emperor for reasons of State, Laura saw her standing in her window. It was a 'ravishing picture.' Hence the discreet designation for fear of possible consequences. Laura wrote later: "When I want consolation, when I am worn out and take refuge in her company, I leave her room soothed and serene."

creature! I love her as if she were my mother: and at this moment, her regard for me almost recalls the feeling of idolatry I had for that unique and accomplished woman to whom I gave that sacred name."

While Permon was wisely hiding himself in the country, his wife entertained largely in Paris. She took one furnished house after another and her circle followed her. There were all elements in her society. *Nouveaux riches*, soldiers on half-pay, starving refugees, especially Corsicans. 'We were the centre of the Corsican Colony in Paris,' said Laura. The Corsicans lived in an atmosphere of penury, vendettas and adventure. They disembarked with greedy schemes of getting control of the Government. The Salicetti, Chiappe, Arrighi, Arena, and last of all the Bonapartes, came to get what they could out of their lovely countrywoman. Napoleon, whose cradle had been rocked by Signora Palormia (this was Madame Permon's name in the family circle), even, it was said, wanted to marry her. They quarrelled shortly after, as the sequel of rather a complicated story.

Palormia, arrogant and narrow-minded, had never been willing to give due recognition to the Bonaparte family.

"The lovely Greek," wrote Laura in a curious letter, "was as famous as Madame Récamier: crowds used to follow her to the theatre and the Tuileries." Indeed, it was in the company of various casual acquaintances that she changed her domicile so frequently; one of them was the ironmaster of Besançon called Ferran, who seems to have been very rich, which explains a great deal. 'He was treated as a member of the household.'

'It was then no time to make difficulties about admitting

anybody to one's house, especially a next-door neighbour,' Laura continued with intentional ingenuousness. 'It was a very singular coincidence that a few months later we found ourselves once more in another furnished hotel, with the same man, at the time of the 13th Vendémiaire.'

Permon died, and his fortune mysteriously faded away. Appearances were, however, kept up and life went on as gaily as before. It was in such surroundings, living from hand to mouth, with a mother given up to amusement and a brother who undertook anybody's dirty work, that Laura grew up and formed her character, in the company of the young Bonapartes and other and rather more distinguished friends, mostly refugees. She was well informed, charming, small and very dark. She had 'Latin teeth' that gave brilliancy to all her features. 'I have never seen anyone so pretty, lively, charming and vivid as she was in her youth – she really was an exquisite sight': Thiébaut tells us.

Most of the women in her circle had their hair cut short in what was called by the hairdressers the 'Titus' style. When the fashion of long hair returned two rival groups were formed, the wearers of wigs and the wearers of turbans. One day one of the turbans, a créole called Fortunée Hamelin, 'the worst woman in Paris,' brought to her friend Palormia's house, General Junot, aide-de-camp to Bonaparte and Governor of Paris.

Junot married Laura on October 28th, 1800. She was sixteen years old and he was twenty-nine.

Junot's story is like a popular novel, miraculous and highly moral, like all miracles. It is the career of a mortal who has had the good fortune to fall in with a god. Since the episode of Toulon, 'Sergeant Storm,' as Junot was then

called, had attached his fortunes to those of Napoleon. It was he who had brought back, a few years before, the flags captured by the Army of Italy.

'He appeared,' said Laura, 'before the people of Paris on the steps of the Luxembourg in his magnificent uniform of Colonel of Hussars, a fine figure of a man, still pale from his wounds: on his right arm was Madame Bonaparte, on his left Madame Tallien, both dressed with that classical correctness which was then the mode.' He was a fascinating fellow. 'He was,' says one witness, 'innocent of the most elementary education and would pat a lady on the legs or the arms to attract her attention.'

The marriage was celebrated under the auspices of the Bonaparte family and from that moment began the 'astounding fortunes' of the Junots. The Subaltern became a General, a Duke, almost a crowned king in Portugal, and was put in possession of the means of satisfying his insatiable appetites: and he died of it.

'The stupid Junot' was not at that time a bad fellow: he had quickly acquired a genuine instinct for grandeur and display. Arthur Chuquet describes him as 'handsome, dashing, and resplendent; in figure, dress, and bearing none could touch him.'

His deterioration was rapid. By 1812 he had become heavy and dull-looking, his forehead had grown narrow and his eyes had lost their lustre; indeed their pupils were of unequal size, the first indication of the general paralysis which was already attacking him. His conceit caused a good deal of amusement, though it was wise not to display it too openly, for he had a disagreeable temper.

'I am my own ancestor,' he would say: yet he always regarded his parents with a respect that almost amounted

to devotion. This is far the most sympathetic characteristic of the great blustering vulgarian.

He wished to have his father ennobled and wrote to the Emperor requesting His Majesty to create Junot senior, Baron de Maix-dames; he could then combine his arms with those of Abrantès and the old gentleman would be made really happy. Junot's father did in fact have engraved upon his visiting cards, 'Father of the Duc d'Abrantès.'

As for his mother, as soon as she had got out of the Burgundy stage coach he took her to dine with M. de Talleyrand, and when the master of the house asked her opinion on the cooking: 'There were rather too many stews,' said she.

'Yes,' agreed her host politely, 'I am afraid it is not up to much.'

On the other hand, in his 'Kingdom of Portugal' Junot compelled his brother-in-law Geoffrey to remain standing when he spoke to him, and address him in the third person as 'My Lord.' Geoffrey found compensations for his politeness; malicious persons called him the Gulf, such was his capacity for engulfing money and indeed anything of value that passed through his hands. We shall meet him again. After Junot's death, he continued to exercise his talents on the property of Laura, his sister-in-law and that of his nephews.

. . . . . .

At St. Helena, on Saturday the 13th July 1816, the Emperor, in conversation with Las Cases, was recalling a scene quite unprecedented in his career. He, Napoleon, when on his way back from Russia, had had to give way to the anger of a woman. 'And I was treated like a schoolboy,' said the Emperor.

It was the Duchesse d'Abrantès who had been responsible for this astonishing achievement. Napoleon went on to say a great deal about the Junots, who were clearly very much in his mind. The same evening, as indeed on every evening, Las Cases wrote down an account of the day's conversation, by the light of a travelling lamp besieged by humming insects; and here the mystery begins. The ten pages in question were censored and excisions, probably very extensive, were made in the chapter dealing with Junot and his wife; on what grounds, and by what authority, is not stated. In the Recollections as we have them, Napoleon relates the Shakespearean story of the husband and his miserable end; he describes the wife reddening with anger at some remarks he made to her 'entirely for her own good.' 'So,' the Emperor concludes, 'I could do nothing but send her away.' Then follow three lines of asterisks and so the chapter ends.

The explanation offered by Las Cases is somewhat confused. He says expressly that the excised portions contain matters of such importance that he had taken great trouble to disguise the facts: but he had not been able to revise them himself so that it had been necessary to cut them out. It is perhaps not unreasonable to suppose that this compulsory discretion was due to Metternich; but there was something else.

Laura d'Abrantès did not at first at all like the somewhat grudging 'sacrifice' of a chapter to the family story. But a literary lady could not be insensible to such marvellous publicity, and to be known to 'a hundred million readers' as the only woman who treated Napoleon like a schoolboy, must surely constitute a pretext, even an obligation, to reply to the Recollections with her Memoirs. They appeared

in 1832 and were awaited with the wildest excitement. Among the titles created by Napoleon for his companions in arms the Dukedom of Abrantès was, in the words of a contemporary, 'the most elegant of them all,' but it was far from being the most famous.

The prodigious success of the Memoirs changed the order of precedence, and the name Abrantès appeared at the head of the roll of fame, forever to remain there. The very magnificence of the title was of great assistance. It was a woman's hand that had rearranged this military hierarchy. It is true that the romantic spirit was then paramount, and the readers of the Memoirs of Madame la Duchesse d'Abrantès loved the majestic rhythms of this sonorous title, which called up all manner of heroic visions.

As she wrote, the anecdotes, gossip, and sketches of character, some in full dress and others more intimate, began to combine into a mosaic of the heroic age. The book as a whole is slovenly, confused, even incoherent, but it is admirable material for those who can catch the implications and decipher the real intentions of the authoress.

In the course of her narrative she did not say much in reply to the Recollections, and thus she jealously guarded the reasons for her silence. She was satisfied with challenging the two witnesses, Napoleon on grounds of health, and Las Cases for his personal animosity.

The Emperor, she said, was in a lethargic condition, such as follows a long march, and this explains the confusion of his ideas on her affairs: that was all.

In the case of Las Cases it was another story. His bitterness against the Junots was due both to wounded pride and disappointed love. His feelings dated from the time of the Consulate. The Junots were then living at Bièvre: they

became acquainted with a neighbour of theirs, a certain Lady Clavering, of French extraction. There was living in this lady's house a . . . protégé, we may call him, who passed as her children's tutor. It was Las Cases, then a young refugee whom she had brought back with her from England. Lady Clavering was, it seems, not insensible to the charms of the fascinating Junot, then aide-de-camp to Bonaparte, in his gorgeous Bercheny uniform. Hence Las Cases's bitterness. Many years later it was to this same Lady Clavering that he wrote the letter from Saint Helena that brought about his expulsion by the Governor, Sir Hudson Lowe.

Laura d'Abrantès having thus dealt with this burning question in which she thought was the appropriate manner, did not trouble herself with any further explanations: she realized their futility. She also passed over in silence the following words of the Emperor which at last did justice to her sadly under-estimated importance. 'Her intimacy with a foreigner was likely to prejudice my policy * * *.' Behind those three asterisks lies the shadow of Metternich.

In the terrific ten-year struggle between Napoleon and the all-powerful Austrian Chancellor, a struggle broken by reconciliations and even matrimonial alliances, Laura d'Abrantès appears hardly at all, and yet her influence on the course of events was tremendous. She became Metternich's mistress in Paris, his adviser, and his, possibly unconscious, agent. During those years when it was essential that Vienna should see clearly what was going on at the Tuileries, she was the eye of Vienna. Napoleon was the only one of her contemporaries to guess this. Later on, the learned M. Turquan published a portion of his private diary, a very pungent and interesting volume.

the Duchesse d'Abrantès

Men of my generation who, in their childhood, used to be taken to play in the Champs Elysées will certainly remember a certain grim edifice whose square façade adjoined the extension of the Hôtel Crillon and looked on to the Rue Boissy d'Anglais. The entrance doors, flanked by two massive columns, were studded with tarnished bronze ornaments: two Greek helmets over a pair of Tuscan swords, and between them a Lion's head whose teeth had given way to the passage of time. At the top of the mansion two figures of Victory, one at each end of the pediment, held up between them the Abrantès' escutcheon. These arms proclaimed Junot's fantastic mode of life and his taste for the magnificent. The escutcheon was supported against a mantle lined with vair, and read as follows: the first, on a field sable three crows and three stars, argent; the second, on a field azure a golden palm tree, and a three-masted vessel or over a sea argent, the fourth, on a field sable a lion rampant charged with a sword argent, in pale. This martial-looking house was pulled down in 1911. In the time of the Junots, drama and comedy alternated under its freshly gilded ceilings. An attempt by Junot to assassinate his wife, or an attempt by the Duchess to poison her husband. There Rovigo came to break the seals when the Duke died: there came the Emperor Alexander looking, as he usually did, like a handsome Greek of the later Empire: and Wellington, haughty and aloof, a hero by accident. While Metternich and the other 'members of the family'[1] crept at dawn down a little passage leading to the Rue St. Honoré.

The enormous escutcheon which served to distinguish

[1] So Laura d'Abrantès called those whom she more especially loved. Her 'little cousins' were her husband's mistresses.

the house of the Governor of Paris, contained, it will be remembered, three crows and three silver stars in its first quartering. This heraldic rebus was inspired by Junot,[1] who was not at all above an allegory of the kind. 'I am my own ancestor,' he would say.

It was thus that Junot's unconscious magnificence symbolized the destinies of his dynasty.

The year is 1812. The silver stars are at their zenith in the radiance of the imperial sun, their creator and their lord.

Laura d'Abrantès foresaw the disappearance of her house and the entire dispersal of all the memories that made it live: above all she foresaw our curiosity as to every living detail of an epoch, so fantastic and yet so near to us, which witnessed the splendour of her fortunes. In her Memoirs she passes abruptly from the first to the third person for the satisfaction of introducing herself, a mere authoress, to Madame la Duchesse d'Abrantès, and giving us a minute account of the splendid elaboration of her toilette.

Ten o'clock. The porter has shut the iron gates of the courtyard from which all the carriages have now departed. The great gallery which had been opened by Joséphine in the costume of Erigona, and the billiard-room in which Metternich used so often to knock the balls about, are

[1] Laura writes in her Memoirs that Napoleon said to her one day: 'I wanted to create Junot Duc de Nazareth, but he would have been called Junot of Nazareth, just as people say Jesus of Nazareth.' In point of fact, it was Junot who, on his own authority, created himself Duc d'Abrantès. The Emperor wrote on April 29th, 1808: 'Since you have taken the title Duc d'Abrantès, you must go on using it . . . you should also communicate with the arch-chancellor in the matter of armorial bearings.'

deserted now. . . . The life of the house is concentrated round the blue room with its walls adorned by statues of all the heroines of history in their conventional poses. 'Your family portraits, I suppose?' the Emperor had asked when he saw them. Their painted plaster countenances are lit up here and there by candles in Greek candelabra of green bronze. All are at their posts. A mob of tradesmen, dressmakers, jewellers, and the like, even creditors, are awaiting their turn for an audience. The Duchess is sitting at her mirror and Frédéric is dressing her hair.

He places on her dark locks a diamond wreath in the centre of which is a large yellow rose of lemon-coloured diamonds: the rest of the wreath is composed of diamond flowers and clusters, and above them are worked in some jacynth sprays of the most clear and lovely blue. 'Her stockings cost eighteen hundred francs a dozen.' 'They are a present from the Duke,' she said laughing. 'Foolishness, I know, but how can I help it?' Cop, her chief bootmaker, is in disgrace: one of her shoes had cracked when she had gone but two steps in it.

'Ah, I see what is the matter: Madame la Duchesse must have been walking!'

This remark was borrowed by Sardou for Madame Sans-Gêne.

Mademoiselle Minette, her maid, slips over her an elegantly embroidered shift, trimmed with Valenciennes, and Madame Coutant a corset delicately adjusted to fit the high waist: Leroy produces the underskirt and Victorine the overskirt which is embroidered with sprigs of myrtle diminishing in size towards the top so as to give the impression of a smaller figure.

Finally, Madame Albert, the chief lady's-maid, opens a

magnificent piece of furniture by Jacob where are kept the Duchess's jewels valued at more than five hundred thousand francs: she takes out the finest jewel then possessed by a private person in Paris: the centre is composed of seven enormous sapphires set in diamonds. At last the Duchess approaches her mirror for a final inspection.

'Stand away,' thundered Blanche: 'would you spill candle-grease on Madame la Duchesse's dress?'

Then Madame Albert hands her mistress an enormous fan of pale tortoiseshell, studded with huge diamonds. 'Now, Madame la Duchesse may go.' Nevertheless it was in her négligé, made in little flounces trimmed with English point lace, that the Marquis de B * * *, whose good taste is infallible, asked her to have her portrait painted by Quaglia: and the following week the Duchess did so.

Who was the Marquis de B * * * and what is the name hidden under these three asterisks? When she was describing, many years afterwards, the Duchess at her toilette, Laura was thinking of her sparkling youth and, naturally, of her handsome lover. It was then Maurice de Balincourt, our hero.

He came of a great family and was descended in the direct line from the Duc d'Elbeuf. He was the great-nephew of the Marshal de Balincourt whose death in the Château de Balincourt is described by Madame de Genlis – that house that saw such strange adventures later on. At the time of the Terror, Maurice was three years old.

His mother, the Comtesse de Balincourt, with her son in her arms, had been dragged by the brutal populace to the dungeons of Sens. She died on the eve of her execution like a poor animal already wounded to death: she was one of the sweetest of women. Maurice and his sister were brought

up by a grandmother. In 1812 he was twenty-three. He was tall and well made, and his fair hair, which grew thick and low on his head, gave him a sort of 'leonine' look, as the Comtesse Merlin says. He had steely blue eyes and a haughty air. He was by common consent the handsomest man of that age of fascinating cavaliers. He already showed that ease and polish of the great gentleman which made d'Arlincourt, who knew the world pretty well, write some time afterwards, 'I have met the Darling of the Muses, the Prince of the Fairy Tale, and the Favourite of Destiny.'

Laura has taken care to describe him for us. The hearts of Queens lay strewn upon his way! 'His person and his face were alike most attractive; his birth and fortune placed him in the front rank. . . .'

Balzac says somewhere: 'Romantic lovers saw the embodiment of their ideal under the Empire': this unnamed model was Maurice de Balincourt.

These are the secret papers, the portfolio of a gentleman who throughout an honourable life showed the most perfect discretion, of which it is proposed to draw up a sort of sentimental inventory.

On the outside of a large yellow envelope is written, in an old-fashioned handwriting, the following words: 'Letters of Laura d'Abrantès, containing various curious matters.' In unfastening the envelope we feel as though Don Juan's casket was opening before us a hundred years after his death. Here is Napoleon's notepaper with its eagle watermark, and in the confusion of pages and handwritings, certain words can hardly be distinguished. They are written in blood. Here, bound in red morocco, is a private diary carefully mutilated. It is stamped with a mysterious cipher,

but soon the sentences deliver up their secrets and the hidden transgressions of famous lives emerge from the kindly shadows. We find the names of Pauline Bonaparte, Queen Hortense, the Queen of Westphalia, the Maréchale Bernadotte, Princess of Sweden, and Madame de Flotte, her lady-in-waiting. The Tuileries, Malmaison, Compiègne, Mortefontaine. Most are but passing fancies: the chief figure is Laura d'Abrantès, the *maîtresse-en-titre*. The penetrating jealousy of her letters form an excellent commentary on these portraits: it is the golden wire that keeps this romantic bouquet together.

Nearly every day, and often twice in the same evening, she wrote to him whom she called her 'joy of love': and this for six years, from 1812 to 1818.

Here may be read from day to day a novel in letters 'so full of feeling' – in the phrase of the day – and tragic too in the mysterious sidelights of which we can catch a glimpse from time to time. But, as we continue our reading of these letters, our curiosity, always a little unworthy where matters of the heart are concerned, gradually gives way to a passionate interest with which lovers of history are familiar. A fresh aspect of events is becoming clear to us. In point of fact, among expressions of affection, these letters contain quite unlooked-for revelations, sometimes in complete contradiction to the accepted facts. The dignified Muse of History looks a little rueful at finding herself in such company. Truth sometimes leaves her well and is found in the blue satin bedchamber of Laura d'Abrantès. And Laura herself draws back the curtains since, to her, history was as the breath of life.

Hardly any of these letters is dated: the collection may be compared to a game of patience played with several hundred

cards. A perusal of them suggested a preliminary arrangement which could be further checked by the character of the notepaper. Under the Empire it is embellished with 'scrolls of fame,' but with the Restoration the traditional lilies reappear. Later on it is a uniform and dignified white. The handwriting itself gives us some assistance. On more than one occasion, Laura, in apprehension of the Imperial police, was obliged to give up her black-edged notepaper, and write in a more perpendicular hand than usual.

Moreover, in the last year or two, having temporarily lost the use of her right hand, she wrote some letters with her left hand, in a schoolgirl's handwriting on wretched notepaper.

Finally – and this was our Ariadne's thread – Laura kept a private diary of the affair from 1812 to 1813. It is an exact guide to her state of mind and gives us the key to more than one of her letters. It is a small book with worn covers, bound in red morocco, encircled by a garland of gilded foliage, with the romantic initials L.A. stamped in the centre of the cover. The covers are lined of pale blue silk, and the opening pages have been torn out.

Every evening Laura gave rein to her double passion: her love and her joy in writing about it. As she goes on Laura refers to two facts: the first is her own attempted suicide: she tells us that at the time of the fatal resolution she was twenty-eight years old. A few months later she speaks darkly of the Queen of Westphalia's presence at Mortefontaine. (November 1813.)

From page to page the style grows more exalted, the pitch is heightened, and then the voice breaks and dies away in sobs. Laura is deserted, she will kill herself, she is dying, she already begins to write of herself as in the past; but the

Beloved comes back, the sight of him calms the storm and Laura's MS. concludes with a sonnet.[1]

[1] Dis-moi ce que j'éprouve en approchant de toi?
Dis-moi quel le trouble ou ton aspect me jette?
Je tremble, je rougis, je sens un doux effroi
Je voudrais le parler et me langue est muette.

Assise à tes côtes, je n'ai plus de maintien.
Je cherche ton regard, le rencontre et l'évite;
Que mon pied, par hasard, se place auprès du tien,
Un feu sacré me brûle et tout mon corps palpite.

Loin de toi, c'est a toi que je pense toujours ;
C'est ton nom qu'en tous lieux je me plais à redire,
Ton nom, dans la longeur et des nuits et des jours,
Qu'à toute heure j'écris, que partout je crois lire.

C'en est trop: si ton cœur reste fermé pour moi,
Sous le poids de mes maux il faut que je succombe.
J'en mourrai, j'y consens: je n'éxige de toi
Que de venir rêver un moment sur ma tombe.

Chapter II

It was the summer of 1812. The army had disappeared somewhere into Northern Europe, and the noise of battles diminished and grew dim in the mists. Never had the Empire placed such a weapon in its Master's hand. Napoleon, in recognition of this, had with him in his travelling carriage a supply of wax and the box of seals, out of which came titles, decorations, grants, and promotions. Everyone might quench his ambition at this magical spring, and especially when young. It was enough to play the game honourably and to persevere. All started level on the same track: and the pace was severe. But the Master's rewards were prompt and just.

'As for the women,' says Laura, 'that summer they were either in the country or giving birth to children. It was a strange time.' She adds a little further on: 'Paris was a curious but pathetic spectacle: everyone was going off – husbands, sons, brothers, lovers, all went off to the wars, and the wives, mothers, sisters and mistresses wept, and to distract themselves they went to take the waters, or to their country houses, or to Switzerland and Italy.'

Junot was with the army: he had first been in charge of the reserves in Italy before the Emperor gave him the command of the Eighth Corps . . . perhaps he would at last win the staff sheathed in velvet which Napoleon had never quite felt able to place in his hands. Even his dukedom did not console him. His wife was meditating how she might most conveniently astonish Society, without, however, involving herself in one of those wearisome summer intrigues which had ceased to amuse her. While still in doubt she went to pay her respects to

Joséphine, Empress *in partibus*, who was said to have greatly changed.

'I found her much stouter, which suited her in some ways but not in others: it suited her face because once a woman is over forty she must grow fatter, so that her features may still keep an illusion of beauty: but it had destroyed her lovely figure which had been her greatest charm. . . . A certain part of her person had indeed grown beyond measure excessive and her manner of dressing made it even more noticeable.'

Joséphine said to her: 'Why not go to Savoy? I will gladly come and visit you there.'

'I accordingly left for Aix on June 23rd, 1812, with Madame la Baronne Lallemand, my most intimate friend, M. de Geouffre, my brother-in-law, and my eldest son who was then three years old. I had bespoken my lodging in advance, for the place was very crowded. . . . I was lucky enough to have chosen a very comfortable house, that of M. Dommanget in a pleasant situation on the main square. It is said to be the best private lodging that can be got at Aix. . . .'

All Paris was at Aix – Court, Town and Theatre. Cliques were formed, exclusive and contemptuous of each other: though they took good care not to be entirely out of touch, for if one cannot find out how deeply one has wounded a rival's feelings what is the use of trying to do so?

To begin with, the most distinguished circle was, as might be imagined, the most decorous. Cardinal Fesch and Madame (mother of the Emperor) were the leading spirits. The Cardinal had leased the house. He had sent from Lyons his plate, his horses, his wines, and his servants. 'I am not anxious,' he wrote to Madame, 'that they should wear my

MARIE-PAULINE BONAPARTE, PRINCESS BORGHESE
From an engraving after the portrait by Lefèvre at Versailles

livery: if you will send yours they can wear that.' This was not at all displeasing to Madame who was not above a little economy.

Laura d'Abrantès had been Maid of Honour to Lætitia! One can see her yawning at the mere mention of Pont-sur-Seine. But the old lady's house is a safe refuge from the storms without. The Permon and the Bonaparte families were always united by strong feelings of racial friendship and the Empress-mother's husband, Charles Bonaparte, died at the Permons' house at Montpellier.

Pauline Borghese lived high up the village in a little house among the vines: 'You must expect muddy feet when you go to visit her. . . .' There was to be found, always on duty, a certain Colonel Duchand, who appeared to enjoy the favours of Paulette. And Talma was always there. Everybody, including Madame d'Abrantès, was in ignorance of the tragedian's good fortune. He took no trouble to conceal a jealous ill-humour which might well have enlightened a malicious public. But Paulette let everyone enjoy the results of her good fortune. It was Talma who made the evening's entertainment: he ranged from Shakespeare to Molière, and by his voice alone he brought each character to life; then he would suddenly pick up the cushions from the sofa and fling them with wild shouts upon the ground: to which the shrieks of his trembling audience were an appropriate response.

Madame d'Abrantès too, to shake off a 'quintessential' boredom, had herself already formed a little 'party' of about twenty people who were to 'foregather regularly.' She was indeed a prey to that vacancy of soul which is caused by the absence of one passionately loved. Metternich was far away. Nevertheless, she entertained her friends, and 'there was

more dust at her door than at those of three Princesses put together.'

The Rambuteau family, Madame Doumerc, daughter of one of her men of business, whom Laura was chaperoning and pushing to the best of her ability, and particularly the gallant Forbin, were her intimates. Forbin divided his attentions impartially between Laura and Paulette.

'M. de Forbin,' said Laura, in connection with his stay at Aix, 'was, in the opinion of everyone, the most agreeable person in French society, and that is to say in Europe . . . his person was handsome and his bearing distinguished. . . .' And the name of Byron falls quite naturally from her pen.

Laura, when speaking of this same Forbin in the manuscript before us, applies to him the epithets, serpent, viper and others equally elegant: still he very conveniently filled up an interval by sitting at the feet of that 'pestilent little Madame Junot.'

Opposite the Dommanget house, in which Laura held her court, was a real queen, living in a much more modest lodging – Julie Clary, wife of Joseph Bonaparte, at that time King of Spain. That very summer he was fighting step by step for his kingdom with his new subjects and their allies the English. He was defending himself with his usual inefficiency and his usual want of authority over his lieutenants or rather the lieutenants of H.M. the Emperor, his brother.

Queen Julie had with her one lady-in-waiting only, Madame Dupuis. Her sister, the Princess of Sweden, wife of Bernadotte, who had already begun a complicated readjustment of his interests, was staying with the queen. Désirée Clary had been engaged to Bonaparte sixteen years before and even asked in marriage by Junot. Laura writes:

'The Princess of Sweden had with her a very charming person, of Greek birth, and very beautiful who died most tragically shortly afterwards: her name was Madame de Flotte.'

Laura d'Abrantès was particularly addicted to the form of literature called Portraits: it was much in fashion in her time and she revelled in this sort of writing. This is the briefest portrait in all her twenty-eight volumes and yet very few of her subjects played a more violent part in her career.

Suddenly Laura and Madame de Flotte fell out. Was it perhaps one of those instinctive enmities which arise from some ill-defined presentiment? However, it is certain that on August 10th, St. Lawrence's day, hostilities were declared. Laura and her party went by boat to Bonport to keep the Saint's feast. Suddenly a storm arose on the lake. Talma, who was, as may be supposed, a member of every expedition, seized his opportunity and, standing upon the deck grasping a small mast, shook the spray from his hair. In this romantic attitude he regaled the company with the first scene of Shakespeare's Tempest.

Laura and her party, overcome with enthusiasm, let off some fireworks as soon as they landed.

Next day Laura d'Abrantès went to visit Madame who intimated to her that the party had given offence because 'fireworks had been let off in the neighbourhood of the Royal Family.' 'I was utterly taken aback,' says Laura, 'and did not know what to say.' But as soon as she had recovered from her first surprise, she did not take long to guess whence the shaft had come. In the first place it could only be a woman. She knew a good deal about the female mind and came to the conclusion that it must be Queen Julie: the Empress-mother was too kind – she had been

influenced. The blow came from Désirée and her faithful Madame de Flotte.

Madame d'Abrantès said nothing and made up her mind to revenge herself suitably upon these ladies when an occasion offered.

Thus war was declared between the two houses on each side of the little square: both parties were watching each other from behind the closed shutters with all the malignant curiosity of life in watering-places. On August 17th it was reported in Laura's circle that a tall young man had arrived at the Queen of Spain's house opposite: by name Balincourt. The Head, in fact, of that illustrious House.

Laura was greatly intrigued and extremely curious. . . . At last she learnt or guessed the reason that brought this gallant guest. He was, and had been for the last six months, on the best of terms with Madame de Flotte, who had induced Désirée to get him an invitation from the Queen.

This is what Laura wrote to Maurice de Balincourt a year later:

"How can you ask me if I felt any emotion at seeing Aix once more? As I entered the town all the blood rushed to my heart. It was August 17th, the very day on which you came last year: and guess where I stayed! In the same room! My landlord to whom I had written for one, had it free and kept it for me. As I went in my head turned round and I could hardly move. However, I soon began to distinguish what was in it. The wall-paper, the sofa and even the curtains were the same. . . . I came upon all the most touching recollections and they tore my heart. I flung myself on the sofa weeping bitterly. Agatha and my brother came to me and tried to console me: how can there be any

consolation for such sorrows? Yet there is one, and I feel it when I remember that I shall see you on Monday. My heart is delightfully excited for the first time for a month at this delicious thought. Oh! Maurice; never tell me that I do not love you, worship you. Alas! This fatal passion dominates and destroys me: it is you, always you, that I long for. It is your name that is on my lips by day: it is you that I see nightly in my dreams: it is you that I adore a thousand times more deeply than I value my life."

Laura and Maurice became acquainted in the most romantic manner. Laura wrote in 1813:

"I should have liked to go and visit that part of the lake where I first knew that I was loved, where you first pressed me to your heart. That is one of the memories which, if I were to live a thousand years, would never be effaced from my mind, and yet, if I had found myself in the scene of my happiness, alone, desolate, away from you whom I adore, my heart would have sunk within me and I should have been unhappy, for recollections are always, always, regrets.

"I wanted to take a rose tree with me and plant it in the place where we had that jumping competition, and where Madame Doumerc and I were sitting in the Sedan chair when you *came to ask for your reward.* I should have liked to consecrate the place but I was never able to carry out my plan."

At last about the end of August 1812, Laura made up her mind to strike a decisive blow. She persuaded, or got Forbin to persuade, the Princess Pauline Borghese to make an excursion to Haute-Combe. Forbin, as we have seen, was a friend, and a very intimate friend, of both ladies, and

Laura was in this way achieving two objects: in the first place, by giving a kind of repetition of her first entertainment which, being this time under the patronage of the Emperor's sister, could not give any grounds for hostile criticism, and secondly, by getting Maurice invited to it. Laura has preserved a list of the guests and a description of their dresses. Monsieur and Madame Rambuteau, Monsieur and Madame Semonille, Forbin of course, Colonel Duchand: Madame Lallemand, Talma: Monsieur de Balincourt: Mesdemoiselles de Menou, Brigode, Jellon: Madame Doumerc and her husband: twenty persons in all. Talma, much annoyed at the troublesome prospect of being called upon by his Imperial mistress to recite verses in honour of the occasion, cast appealing looks at the ladies.

But the Princess had still not yet arrived. At last she made a languid appearance, an hour late as usual, carried on a litter. Her dress had been designed by Laura d'Abrantès who took a good deal of pride in it.

'The skirt was of cambric richly embroidered and edged with the finest Valenciennes lace, and over it a shorter dress called a "polonais," ' says Laura. 'She wore a hat of Italian straw turned back with three immense scarlet feathers and ribbons to match. Colonel Duchand came in full-dress uniform which made him very conspicuous among a company of the most elegant gentlemen from Paris, all wearing plain coats, as they always do in the country.'

At last they reached the Abbey and left the boat. Laura was on the arm of Forbin who was indefatigably explaining the curiosities of the place to an inattentive audience. She tried to catch Maurice's eye and felt his look lingering and resting on her own. An exquisite languor stole upon her

senses. At the same time Duchand's blue hussar's dolman came nearer and nearer to the Princess's 'polonais.' Paulette felt that Laura, like herself, was on the point of falling in love, and, as might be expected, she recited a sonnet of Petrarch written for another Laura. Later on the Duchesse d'Abrantès will give us a tender account of the slightest incidents of that day: she will cast a discreet veil over the birth of her love and for that reason she will reveal that of Paulette, as though the veil of discretion were not large enough to cover them both.

And Laura adds:

'This was the day on which Monsieur le Colonel Duchand was taken into favour.'

Night falls upon the lake: Laura lets her thoughts drift on as the water slips by, and Maurice's hand feels in the darkness for the lovely fingers 'turned back like the petals of fresh white tulips.'

'The journey back was exquisite. The Princess recited some more poetry but I did not listen. I was sitting in the boat overcome by a kind of spell that only so lovely a country can evoke. Gladly would I have spent all night upon the tranquil blue waters of the lake with its shady flower-strewn shores.'

When Laura tells in her Memoirs the story of her return, her return voyage from Cythera, years had passed. Lamartine[1] had immortalized that very lake, and Laura mingles a little of Elvira's enchantment with her far-off ecstasy.

"To-day is the 7th, Maurice. I am sure you do not remember that it is a year to-day since we walked together

[1] There was only a year's difference between the ages of Lamartine and Balincourt.

by the Lake. . . . I remember it so clearly, and the 10th as well. On that date I must positively see you. If you do not come – I don't mind how or when – I will never pardon you so long as I live.

"When I think of it, I cannot imagine how I can have lived until last year without knowing you and loving you, Maurice."

Laura had played with fire and the adventure suddenly became a love affair. The 'woman of feeling' was no more: her young admirer had transformed her into a passionate lover.

"I am no longer myself: you are myself. You are the motive of my actions: it is only when you are with me that I feel and think, and all my life, Maurice, will be employed in proving to you that in your fond and loving mistress you have also a friend, a sister and a mother, all, in fact, that are intended by nature to love, help and protect you.'

And again:

"I wait for you, and, when you have gone, I long for you;–thus all my life is spent. I never thought to love as I love you. . . . You are so intensely and so constantly before my mind that my blood begins to burn and I grow nearly mad when I am away from you;–that is love. You have seen me in your arms weeping on your breast, weeping for happiness that must be like the bliss of angels. Why do I feel so much? .What could thus stir my whole being? Love, a passionate love, like none that I have ever known: a love that makes my eyes grow dim when I look at you, and my whole body shudder when I press you to my heart. It is the violence of my passion that makes my joy so

violent: how often have I cried out when I was with you: 'How blessed I am in my love for you.' I shall never know such moments of ecstasy as I feel when I hear your footstep, and your name announced.

"Farewell. I shall try to sleep. Make my awakening a happy one.

"I send you these few verses: read them and if you like them I will tell you the name of the author. . . ."

The verses[1] in question therefore belong to the year 1812. Who wrote them? Are they really from Laura's pen or

[1] Laisse en tes yeux si purs et si beaux d'innocence
Triste, plonger mes yeux,
Car j'ai besoin de voir aux regards de l'enfance
Se réfléchir les cieux.
L'aspect pur et riant de ta naïve joie
Calmera pour un jour
Ces orages brûlants qui me livrent en proie
Aux transports de l'amour.
Fuis-les, ces ouragans, courbe ta blonde tête,
Enfant, quand ils viendront,
Car on garde longtemps d'une telle tempête,
La trace sur le front.
Ou si Dieu l'a voulu, jette au cou de ta mère
Tes deux bras languissants,
Une mère a toujours ses bras prêts quand la terre
Manque a nos pas tremblants.
Une mère, vois-tu, c'est la l'unique femme
Qu'il faut aimer toujours,
À qui le Ciel a mis assez d'amour dans l'âme
Pour chacun de nos jours.
Aux suaves accents de sa voix douce et tendre,
Endormi mollement,
Aime ta mère, enfant, aime-la sans apprendre
Que l'on aime autrement.

were they copied from a magazine? We do not even know if they were unpublished. The 'worthy' Albert, Laura's brother and her usual collaborator according to Thibaudaut,[1] may possibly have contributed to this unexpected masterpiece.

The composition is admirable, and everything, parti-

Aimer! parole triste! Insultante ironie,
Pour qui vit un matin!
Mot fatal! et qui n'a d'écho dans cette vie
Qu'amertume et dédain!
Oh! choisir une femme et créer autour d'elle
Tout un monde enchanté,
Et vouloir seulement pour la rendre immortelle
Une immortalité.
À ses moindres discours attacher tout son être
Ému d'un doux espoir
Et mourir tout le jour, hélas! à se promettre,
Un sourire le soir;
Et lorsque ce regard que le regard mendie
On n'a pu l'obtenir,
Sentir avec terreur à l'âme anéantie
Échapper l'avenir;
À la vie, au bonheur, dans la douleur farouche,
Jeter un morne adieu,
Tomber à deux genoux, le front contre sa couche
Et s'écrier: 'Mon dieu!
Au lieu de les laisser l'un sur l'autre descendre
Si pesants à mon cœur,
Mon dieu, ne pourriez-vous ensemble les reprendre
Tous ces jours de malheur!'
Épuiser des tourments qu'en la terre ou nous sommes
On ne peut exprimer;
Lentement en mourir! Dans la langue des hommes,
Cela s'appelle: aimer!

[1] Albert de Permon, says Thibaudaut, composes verses and novels, and academic orations. He paints and plays the harp well.

cularly the avoidance of adjectives, shows a mastery of form and portends a new poetic style. It suggests Chénier,[1] who, however, was not yet known; Lamartine[2] even more – his, indeed, is the inspiration of the irregular prosody.

We shall now publish a document that is unique in the annals of amorous correspondence. It is a certain letter addressed by Laura to Maurice, probably about this time. The entire letter is written in her blood. Laura snatched the pen from her travelling case, chose one of the veins in her left arm at the bend of the elbow and, shutting her eyes, she thrust in the pen. She went on writing as long as the blood flowed from her wound: indeed it is splashed all over the letter. This letter of blood was often imitated in novels. Certain authors knew of it from private information or tradition. Balzac wrote in *La Fille aux Yeux d'Or*: 'She showed him letters in which the young man saw with amazement lines traced in blood used for the more passionate expressions.' Octave Feuillet also describes a scene of the kind. Balzac returns to the subject in the *Peau de Chagrin*, and it is a phrase of Laura that he puts into the mouth of his hero, Valentin: 'Oh! how I wished that I could write my love in all my blood.' This moving document is before us: it is barely decipherable, as the paper is torn along one of the folds. For a hundred years it had not left the protecting pages of the diary between

[1] The first edition of Chénier's works appeared in 1819.

[2] Laura did not like Lamartine, at least so she wrote many years later to Victor Hugo. But that is almost certainly a neatly turned compliment to the rising star. 'Has M. de Lamartine any claims to be a poet? He composed verses I admit. But I find him wearisome. He is a sentimentalist and there is nothing in his head.'

the blue silk endpapers. The words fill the page exactly; the writing is clear. It is somewhat thick in parts and there is a large blot under the name Laura: and a large smear of blood in the top left-hand corner.

"As long as the blood that I am using to write this letter shall flow in my veins, as long as there is a breath of life to make my heart beat, I swear at the feet of God who hears me, by my holiest and purest feelings, that I shall love you best of all. I have never known a love like this: and I repeat here what you have already said: 'If I am not yours then the grave must claim me.' Yes, Maurice, it is you or death. 'Tis my heart that speaks, and it will always speak so – just as its last beat will be for you. I swear it once more and nothing shall ever make me break my oath.

"LAURA."

Another letter accompanies this epistle of blood:

"Keep the promise I am sending you. It is but the bare truth. I want you to preserve it and long long afterwards you may thank me for having said long before what was nothing but the truth. My beloved, the blood that I have been using is yours and yours alone: there is not a drop that does not belong to you. Shall I never be fortunate enough to prove to you that my whole being, my fortune, my life, indeed all that I have, is yours, and that I only value them because you may one day claim them all.

"Send me back my book; I will only keep it an hour. Send it back to me and with it one word only; this: 'I love you.' That will last me for a few hours' happiness.

"Farewell, I press you to my heart and I love you more than my life."

On a certain Monday at five o'clock, Laura was writing to Maurice as follows:

"I am sending you *Les Deux Savinies*. It is a charming story by Madame de Genlis about two sisters who love each other so deeply that they have everything in common, all their sufferings, both moral and physical. They are in such deep sympathy that one survives the other for only a day. That, Maurice, is how I love you. Heaven has so bound me up with you that I am not in the least exaggerating when I assure you that, when you are not there, all my intellectual faculties are completely paralysed, but that your absence has a most sinister physical effect on me. My breathing grows difficult and my heart is constrained: I do not hear and see so well, and only my children are able to bring me to myself, but not to banish you from my mind. You must not be surprised that I thirst (if I may use the word) for a sight of you. It is only when you are near me that I have that sense of calm and well-being that I have lost since I have been in love with you and that I only recover when I am breathing the same air as you. Remember yesterday morning. I was not in your arms but you were there. I saw you. I heard your voice and I was happy beyond what any words can express. Ah! Maurice, only once in life does one love like this, and only once is one loved as much.

"I send you a fable. Keep it for yourself and show it to no one: it is quite easy to write unpretentiously like this. I make no claims and, if I made it known, I should be

thought to be doing so. Only tell me what you think: if you like it I shall be happy."

The Fable[1] which Laura says she is sending to Maurice is the Duchesse d'Abrantès' first literary effort. It cannot be

[1] Pâle, décolorée
Sur sa tige inclinée
Mourut avant le temps.
Au sein d'un épais buisson,
A l'abri de l'aquilon,
Fleurissait ignorée
Rose vermeille et parfumée.
De l'ombrage qui la couvrait
L'épaisseur était si profonde
Qu'à peine le jour pénétrait
À plus de dix pas à la ronde
La belle fleur ainsi gardée
Et loin des curieux regards,
Il est vrai, croissait ignorée,
Mais du moins était à l'abri
De tous dangers de tous hazards.
Hélas! cette jeune imprudente
Bientôt de cet état éprouva de l'ennui!
Et regrettant que sa forme charmante
Ne pût briller au milieu de ses sœurs,
De son exil, de ses douleurs,
Elle accusa le buisson épineux,
Disant: 'Hélas! faut-il de ma jeunesse
De ce beau temps d'amour et d'allégresse
Passer ainsi les jours les plus heureux,
Et sans raison
Sans espoir d'être vue,
Dans une horrible prison
Vivre et mourir inconnue! . . .
– Tais-toi, (repondit le buisson
D'un ton rude et sévère),

denied that it contains a very singular instance of literary prophecy.

This is no place to discuss the existence of premonitory visions. We would merely remind those interested in the

Tais-toi, tête folle et légère
Et n'appelle point ennemi
Celui
À qui tu dois de la reconnaissance,
Puisqu'il est ta seule défense.
Si du brûlant Midi
Tu n'éprouves point les outrages;
Si jusqu'ici
De la grêle et du vent les terribles ravages
Ne se sont pas étendus jusqu'à toi,
N'est-ce donc pas à moi,
A l'enveloppe protectrice
Que tu taxes d'injustice,
Que tu dois d'échapper à leurs funestes coups?
Tais-toi donc et retiens un injuste courroux,
Chéris en paix la demeure ignorée
Où maintenant, tranquille, fortunée,
Ta vie s'écoule doucement,
Loin des dangers et des tourments,
Auxquels la jeunesse insensée
N'est que trop souvent exposée.'
Il se tait et la fleur de colère frémit.
A son aide, elle appelle
Sur son garde fidèle,
Vent, tonnerre, tempête et tout ce qui s'ensuit.
Le Ciel exauca sa prière
D'un coup de serpe, un vilain abattit
La piquante barrière.
Le malheureux buisson, en morceaux tout coupé.
Tombe autour de la fleur dont il est détesté.
Loin de le plaindre alors, la rose ivre de joie
Rit en voyant le sort auquel il est en proie,

subject that Laura states this as a fact in her own experience and alleges it to be supported by irrefutable evidence. Junot, mortally injured, appeared to her in her room at Geneva, at the precise moment when he was dying in Burgundy.

The Duchesse d'Abrantès has been carried down to posterity by the enthusiasm with which her Memoirs were

Ne songeant qu'au plaisir dont elle va jouir
Étant enfin delivrée
De cette entrâve abhorrée.
Bientôt l'amoureux zéphir
De son aile caressante
Flatte la rose charmante
Et l'aube du matin
Des perles de sa rosée
Orne et rafraichit son sein.
De tout ce qui l'entoure, admirée, enviée,
La rose alors crût que jamais destin
N'avait été plus heureux que le sien.
Mais, ô Dieu, du plaisir que l'heure est peu durable!
La pauvre fleur, sans appui, sans soutien,
Devient bientôt, hélas! cent fois plus misérable
Que lorsque du buisson la sévère bonté
Cachait à tous les yeux sa naissante beauté.
Sur sa tige fragile,
La vorace chenille
S'attache avidement,
Bientôt insolemment
Le vilain limaçon, de son écume affreuse,
Souille le sein de la fleur malheureuse,
Qui, demeurant en butte à tous les coups
Du soleil et du vent éprouvant le courroux,
À peine en son printemps,
Pâle, décolorée,
Sur sa tige inclinée
Mourût avant le temps.

greeted. But her first literary composition is a vision of her whole existence. With a foreknowledge that is almost incredible, she details, in the form of a fable, the various stages of her bitter destiny. Alone perhaps among all female authors she had the painful privilege of turning the pages of the book of her life before she covered them with her passionate handwriting.

Moreover, Laura was born at midnight: and those concerned with such matters regard her as one of the 'children of midnight' who are said to have the gift of divination.

The fable was composed in 1812, a year before Junot's death. Laura was twenty-eight years old and she could still write

> No destiny has ever been
> So happy as my own.

In the fable Junot figures as a thorny hedge: Maurice also makes a brief appearance as an amorous Zephyr. Finally Laura predicts her pitiable end.

Chapter III

MAURICE and Laura allowed themselves to be carried gently along on the wings of their young affection when September began to shed its gold on the borders of the lake and Moscow burst into sudden flames at the other end of Europe. But Russia was so far away, and though Laura sometimes thought of Junot, it was to Maurice that her reflections always turned.

"Since I have become acquainted with my heart I feel the need of happiness: I have long looked for it but I have never found it except with you. Married very young to a man with whom I was passionately in love I saw him sever, with his own hands, the bonds that united us, and form others unworthy both of me and of himself, and from that instant my life was ruined for ever. I sought for distractions and found more than enough: but they never really brought me the happiness that I looked for and seemed always to escape me. It is only since I have loved you that I feel that I could become the happiest woman in the world. I feel it by the strange ecstasy that overcomes me when you are near and when, too, you swear that you cannot do without me. I feel it also when, in the agonies of my unhappy heart, I realize that I, too, cannot live without you and that without your love my life is empty and worthless."

Laura accepted her husband's 'unworthy liaisons' with a smiling acquiescence. She called Junot's favourites 'her little cousins.' The resulting family was very considerable but she never admitted it, and nothing is more amusing than the line she adopts later in order to conceal the truth. Thus the parts of her Memoirs which deal with this autumn

of 1812 are full of interminable celebrations of Junot's domestic virtues illustrated by quotations from letters addressed to her from Russia. 'The Duc d'Abrantès was,' Laura tells us, 'a good father, while his warm heart and his sympathetic mind made him a good husband: there were none like him . . . etc., etc.'

A hundred years after the retreat from Russia, the *Sabretache* published some letters intercepted by the Cossacks during the campaign of 1812. They are very poignant documents. The great qualities of the race are evident on every page: all these brave men, on the point of being frozen to death, turn their eyes towards the promised land without hope but without weakness. In every line one can feel their agony at leaving the homely happiness that they are to know no more.

Moreover, the Junot *ménage* served as the comic interlude in the sombre drama. The double duplicity of the pair, when one knows their respective conduct, seems the most pitiable pantomime. The Duc d'Abrantès, though at a distance of many thousand miles from the other characters, plays a puerile and complicated part in the comedy.

It was not until certain recent revelations made by the Russians that we could understand what game Junot was playing. In the first place, the Cossacks have preserved for us a letter of Laura's, a copy of which Junot was sending back to her, a sort of indictment which he answers, point by point, in one of his replies: the letter is dated September 7th, the very day on which Maurice was made 'happy.'

After taking her husband very sharply to task and relieving herself, in a truly conjugal manner, of the first access of her ill-humour, Laura gives the following account of her feelings.

'AIX, *7th September*, 1812.

'I have long had that ambition which is shared by nearly all women, that wild desire to attract looks and tributes, to inspire passionate feelings, and to be a kind of divinity to all around me. I paid for all this adoration with a look, a smile, which often stirred the heart for which they were intended without arousing the slightest response in my own. Well, it is with the most bitter regret that I recall this part of my life, and I now think it wicked to encourage or inspire a feeling that I cannot share.'

Is this cynicism or the most astounding ingenuousness? Laura concludes with the following unexpected sentiment:

'Believe me, it is only from weakness that one maintains an unreasonable attachment, and the word constancy is profaned when it is applied to folly.'

Napoleon said that Junot was already out of his mind in Russia. Laura, in this letter, refers to his mental state without believing in it, and yet the part that Junot was to play indicated some degree of cerebral disturbance.

The letter reached him on October 13th. The Duke d'Abrantès wrote five answers on the same day. One is dated from Mojaisk, and the others from Moscow, but all these letters were, of course, written from the same place and seized by the Cossacks from the same courier. The first is a letter to Laura dated from Moscow:

He is astonished at getting no news. She wants to make him 'growl': but he does not care. Laura wants to make fun of him . . . he is in love with his wife. His love must be held by the bonds that nature provides, but not too closely or he will do his best to escape.

CAROLINE, QUEEN OF NAPLES

Irreproachable sentiments, in the best manner. He concludes as follows:

'What has become of Calo? Neither you nor anyone else says anything about her: did the waters do her any good? Give me some news of her since she will not send me any herself.'

Calo is the young Baroness Caroline Lallemand, Laura's intimate friend. The name Caroline, and its diminutives for the matter of that, played a considerable part in Junot's amours: not including Caroline Murat, who in her capacity of Queen had to keep her Christian name intact. Junot called the Baroness Lallemand Caro, like all her friends, or Calo, as his son Napoleon d'Abrantès was in the habit of doing.

By way of distinction he called his other mistress, the Baroness Foy, Line. One day when writing to Laura and to Madame de Foy he got the envelopes confused and this caused the most violent explosion, which was, however, followed by a general reconciliation.

On the same day, October 13th, he wrote a long letter to Madame de Foy which he dates from Mojaisk. He jokingly threatens to kill her and goes on:

'What on earth would become of me if I killed my Line? I should do like the handsome Dunois when he so unluckily killed the beautiful Dorothea. I should withdraw my sword and fall upon it myself. But it is better to be near Line when she is well, to love her, to say so and hear her say it, and catch the charming word as it leaves her rosy lips.'

Nothing could be more gallant. Junot signs himself

Alexandre, which is an indirect tribute to Laura who obliged him to suppress Andoche, his real Christian name, and substitute Alexander which was the name of the Emperor, of Berthier, Prince of Neufchâtel and other great personages of the time.

Next Junot writes to Caro. Here is the letter to the Baroness Caroline Lallemand. . . . Junot is posing for her benefit. . . .

'Dear Caroline knows if I have loved her, if I do love her. Dear creature! Is it to be supposed that I alone have no eyes and am so stupid that I cannot recognize perfection when I see it?'

He concludes by imprinting a kiss on dear Calo's serene forehead and signs himself simply 'Duke.'

Finally there is the letter which is the thread of Ariadne to guide us in this labyrinth of replies. It is to his secretary.

The Duke sets about him to some purpose. His ridiculous economy has reduced his master's wardrobe to the most deplorable condition. This secretary, by name Fissont, was the general factotum of the household. It was he who dealt with the 'contributions' made to Junot in Portugal.[1] He subsequently became an exchange-broker.

'The gloves are worthless and look as if they were in-

[1] In many of these affairs, details of which may be found in Thiébaut, Junot's exactions were severe. Napoleon encouraged him somewhat in the following letter: 'Don't be so weak and stupid as to let your supply-services and your troops want for money.'

The country was divided into sections, and for once Junot followed the instructions. To his house in the Rue des Champs-Élysées came cases full of valuable books, precious stones and especially the Indian diamonds for which Portugal was for so long the market.

tended for an actor at the Variétés. I want green gloves and strong ones, and you must pay 30 francs for them, not 26 francs. The boots instead of having been made about an inch larger round the calf have been let out about a foot. They are big enough to fit my thigh. It is M. Farina and not M. Oubigand who makes Eau-de-Cologne. Economy does not consist in buying what is cheapest, it consists in choosing what is best and paying the right price for it.

'You will give the smaller letter to the Duchess as soon as you get it: if the larger one reaches you in the evening you will not give it her until the following day saying that it arrived by a different courier: in the same way if it arrives in the morning you will deliver it four hours after the small one saying that there were two packets for you by the courier but by a mistake only one had been given to you. You will deliver the letter to Madame Lallemand at the same time as the small one to the Duchess, but without her seeing you: if she is with the Duchess you will get her away on some pretext.

'With courage, economy, and care, all should go well. Farewell: I am in good health.

'THE DUKE.'

Next and last comes the long letter to the Duchess which Junot mentions to his secretary.

The 'stupid' Junot was far from a fool. He understood Laura, and her reproaches, together with the subsequent brief essay on flirtation which he had just received from Aix, opened his eyes a little.

Junot begins by saying that he has before him twenty-nine letters from Laura: he adds carelessly that he does not keep rough copies of his own letters, and he cannot re-

member whether he had asked her to send him salves for his wounds or a flask of poison.

'I have indeed a few scars, and I wish you would heal them, if only that my restored appearance might serve to lend more charm to our intercourse.

'I was greatly encouraged by your general confession and I realize clearly that a woman who so frankly admits her faults to her husband has truly made up her mind and will never again do anything of which she might be ashamed. Persevere, my dear, in your resolution never to inspire sentiments which you cannot share, and still less those which you might be disposed to share.'

Such is the little comedy not unmixed with wise advice, that Junot reckoned on carrying through with the assistance of a courier. These letters took one hundred and ten years to reach us – presumably a record in postal delay.

And yet the Tsar made some very polite excuses in 1814. He hinted at letters written by Laura and intercepted by his Cossacks, letters which had put him in possession of the intricacies of this characteristically Parisian household. Indeed, Alexander's visits to the Duchesse d'Abrantès, which so much gratified her, were probably due to his consequent curiosity.

At Mojaisk Junot and his brilliant staff occupied the Governor's palace. There was an abundance of everything, Baron Teste tells us, and the revels of the officers were in painful contrast to the sufferings and misery of the large numbers of wounded.

Before being degraded to the comfortable post of Town-Commandant Junot had had the fortunes of the campaign

in his hands. 'Junot,' said the Emperor later, 'made a capital blunder that day. He was no longer himself.'

Since the very beginning of the Russian campaign luck had gone against Napoleon. Not one of his manœuvres, in spite of the incompetence of the Russian General Staff, had given the results that he had a right to expect. On August 16th, before Smolensk, the enemy had piled one mistake upon another. Torn with impatience, the Emperor had been able to get no advantage from them. But three days later the luck turned. It was August 19th, 1812. The Russians were retreating hurriedly into a long marshy cul-de-sac shut in by the Dnieper. Murat, who was in command of the cavalry of the Grand Army, grasped the situation in an instant: here was the decisive victory for which the Emperor was looking – a second Austerlitz, the enemy annihilated, Moscow taken without a blow, the campaign brought to an end in the middle of summer, the future of the world decided once and for all. It was a case for infantry action: the horses' hoofs sank into the sodden ground. Marshal Ney was already heavily engaged with the enemy. Junot and his infantry were only a few hours distant. To all intents and purposes the Russian army was doomed. Then appeared the element of the incalculable which decides victories. Junot refused to advance. Why? No one has ever known. He urged the unfavourable condition of the ground, the absence of a definite order from the Emperor. . . . As a matter of fact his mind had already given way.[1] As every minute was worth an hour, and Napoleon was still at Smolensk, Murat did a fine thing. Putting his personal feelings on one side, ignoring

[1] At the battle of Valontina Junot was already out of his mind. (Recollections.)

the fact that this very Junot had been for several months, to the knowledge of all Europe, his wife's lover, the King of Naples went to see him at his headquarters, and begged and prayed him to move: in vain. At last 'the Man of a Thousand Feathers,' as Junot called him, shouted in that southern voice of his that could raise whole squadrons to their feet. 'Forward, you fool! You'll find your Marshal's bâton at the end of it.' It was no use. Junot sat immovable on an old travelling valise, in a state of pitiable and tearful collapse.

The Russian army had a miraculous escape from disaster.

Napoleon's anger was terrible. But, once again, Junot escaped its just consequences, since he was still in command of his Army Corps at the battle of Moskowa on September 7th, the very day that witnessed the 'happiness' of Maurice and Laura at Aix. Shortly afterwards the Duc d'Abrantès was writing home:

'I wrote you a line, my dear Laura, after the great battle of the 7th to let you know I was not dead. I have never heard such a din of bullets, grapeshot, shells and cannon balls as on that day. All my staff-officers who were with me were killed or wounded, without exception. I came through all the tumult without the slightest injury, and without moving, except in the way of duty, and without dismounting; and here I am, perfectly well.'

'I suppose you are in Paris now. You are among your children and I am here surrounded by more than 3,000 wounded, Russian, French or Allied. It is a dreadful spectacle, Rapp, Grouchy, Nansouty, Friant, Gratien are among them, etc.'

'You must love me very much to console me for being away from you. Kiss the children for me and pray for your husband's return as earnestly as he prays to be able to be with you whom he loves with all his heart. All my respects to Calo.'

Laura notes: 'I left Aix for France on September 28th. It was then that we began to feel uneasy. The news from Russia was of the very best, but private letters told another story.'

Laura travelled viâ Lyons and stayed in that city for four days under the pretext of visiting Cardinal Fesch. As a matter of fact she wanted to see Madame Récamier who had been exiled there by the Emperor, and was lodging at the time at the Hôtel de l'Europe. Napoleon's harshness was due to causes that are unexplained, but the pretext given was the fact that Madame Récamier had stayed at Coppet with Madame de Staël, who was the Emperor's particular enemy. At Lyons, in that wretched inn bedroom, 'divided by a screen,' sat Juliette 'as self-possessed and gracious as in her sumptuous hôtel in the Rue du Mont Blanc: she was wearing a plain white dress, with her hair very simply done.' Madame Doumerc obliged the company with a song composed for the occasion, '*We must away, farewell, my Laura.*' At the final couplet everyone burst into tears, for the company were one and all 'sympathetic souls.'

'Perhaps my dog will die
When his loved mistress goes.'

'Alas,' says Laura, 'how sad these verses are! I can imagine the exile weeping as he hears them.'

The Duc d'Abrantès, to whom doubtless a combined

letter had been written, replied from the depths of Russia with one of those pompous missives of which he was very lavish:

'MOJAISK. *October 25th*, 1812.

'I am very glad to hear that you went to see our good sweet Juliette as you passed through Lyons: her heart is as kind as her person is lovely.'

Laura, in her Memoirs, says that the reason for her hurried return was the extreme youth of her children's English governess, whose want of experience made her so nervous that she was obliged to get back to Paris as soon as possible. As a matter of fact, Maurice was a guest of Queen Julie at Mortefontaine. The place was two hours distant from Paris. Laura travelled at top-speed, showering gratuities on the postillions.

At Mortefontaine, Julie, who was fatigued by her cure at Aix, hardly went out at all. There was something autumnal about the life led by the little Court in these melancholy surroundings. Mortefontaine had become a symbol of the Queen's fortunes. Since the year 7, when it had been bought from the executors of Duruly, who had been Financial Secretary to the Foreign Office, the huge building had been continually expanding. The house had originally consisted of 'A main building between two large pavilions, and a long projecting wing on the left, the whole roofed in with slate . . . stabling and coachhouses . . . a large park adorned with urns and sculptures . . . ornamental water with several fountains in working order.' So runs the inventory. But the place gradually turned into a Palais-Royal almost (in a sense) against its will. The transformation took place exactly in accordance with the steady rise

in its owner's fortunes, but did not follow any settled scheme or plan. King Joseph, with a view to rounding off the property, included certain other buildings which served as accommodation for his guests' servants, until it should be possible to rebuild the place entirely, which was never done. A century has sufficed to despoil Mortefontaine of the adornments that it owed to the wealth of the Clary family. Joseph Bonaparte would find the house to-day in about the same condition in which he bought it from Duruly's executors. The park in which the King personally supervised his gangs of workmen is intact: only some of the 'outbuildings' have fallen into decay, or disappeared.

The present owner of Mortefontaine, Madame la Comtesse Amelot, has kindly allowed us to see an inventory dated July 1827 when the estate was sold to the Bourbons by the Clary family. In this we find mentioned: 'a very beautiful "orangery," a private theatre with wings, stage, boxes fitted with screens, circle and gallery seats, a room for the actors and storage accommodation for the scenery.'

'At the end of the park, a building called the Temple from which fine views can be obtained: a two-storied tower, an ice-house,' etc. . . .

This inventory is characteristic of the age. It was sent by Madame de Villeneuve, née Clary, to . . . 'The most high, mighty and most excellent Prince, Monseigneur Louis Henri Joseph de Bourbon, Duc de Bourbon, Prince de Condé, Prince of the Blood, Peer of France, Lieutenant General of the King's Armies, Knight of the Royal Orders and of the Orders of the Golden Fleece, of Charles III, Duc d'Enghien, of Guise and of the Bourbonnais, etc., etc. . . . domiciled in Paris at his Palace, Rue de l'Université. . . .'

In the course of the document King Joseph is described as 'Bonaparte' without any other title and the Queen as 'Madame, née Clary, his wife.'

However, in 1812 the master of the house was away, reigning over one of the most splendid kingdoms in the world. As for the Queen, 'She was an angel always folding her wings,' says Laura, 'and quite incapable of making any noise in the world.' Her sister Désirée was with her, and the faithful Madame de Flotte. The Princess of Sweden occupied a room embellished with an enormous portrait of Bernadotte, her husband. She was thought to be deeply involved in intrigues with Talleyrand, but politics were far from her mind. Her time was divided between Chiappe, her lover, whom the Emperor had unkindly exiled to a distant province, and the advice that she lavished on Madame de Flotte. This advice turned upon how best to detach Maurice from Laura d'Abrantès, and recover his affections. The Princess promised to do everything she could for her lady-in-waiting, and she undertook to *get the warmest support* of her sister Queen Julie.

For eighteen months, in the midst of the most terrible events in the outside world, Mortefontaine was torn by the struggle between the two women. It was a duel to the death. Each had her supporters. At first Laura seemed to be yielding: she tries to commit suicide and fails: at length she recovers her courage, perseveres and at last triumphs, and the bitter, terrible, bloody drama comes to an end with her rival's death, while the Empire disappears into the cyclone of its destruction.

Laura's attempted suicide, Junot's madness and death, the liaisons of Maurice and the two Queens, the mysterious end of Madame de Flotte, are events of the first importance

that are almost unknown and pass before our eyes in these letters of Laura. The terrible shadow of the Emperor, though far off and unseen, dominates the drama, and before Dresden he laid all other matters aside and wrote to Rovigo about the affair, thinking, not for the first time, that he could regulate human passions by a stroke of the pen.

Chapter IV

ONLY Laura's letters have come down to us. Sometimes she herself answers the questions that she asks Maurice: she quotes whole passages from his letters and loves to mingle his phrases with her own.

As soon as Laura got back to Paris the struggle between the two women began. One can see Maurice going from one to the other, at first amused, but soon becoming uneasy and trying to parry the blows which these ladies were exchanging over his head – regardless of consequences.

Laura was certainly nearer to Maurice's station in Society. She was fond of all sorts of display and claimed to be descended from the Imperial Family of the Comneni, and as yet nobody dared laugh at her openly. She was the wife of the Governor of Paris: she kept a princely establishment and lived in every sort of luxury. She always had an account of 10,000 francs at her 'dressmakers.' She dazzled and bewitched this youth of six-and-twenty, and what is more she flattered his literary taste, to which, indeed, we owe the preservation of Laura's letters, that were to lie hidden for a hundred years in their yellow envelope.

We only know Madame de Flotte through Laura. She was a Greek by birth and very beautiful. She lived on very intimate terms with Désirée, Princess of Sweden. Laura makes very obvious allusions to their intimacy: 'Queen Julie only sees through the eyes of her sister.' It is Laura who talks, but after all Madame de Flotte was in possession. It was useless for Laura to flaunt her diamonds, her horses and her thousand love affairs. Madame de Flotte, through Queen Julie, wielded the power. Maurice was promised the position of Chamberlain. In all Napoleon's quarrels

with his family he always kept a very special and privileged place for his sister-in-law, Julie. There was something in her simplicity and her unabashed ugliness that could always influence the Emperor. In his view it was the first matrimonial alliance that had advanced the fortunes of the Bonapartes. Though it infuriated him to see Julie looking in her Court dress like a figure at a Carnival, Napoleon could refuse her nothing, even a favour for King Joseph her husband.

Maurice was spending the greater part of his time at Mortefontaine. As he was not yet officially attached to the Queen's person he kept on his bachelor establishment in Paris and, as a matter of fact, he saw Laura nearly every day.

"The children want to go out for a walk . . . and I am very glad to have this slight pretext for writing to you. I am so happy to-day: you have made me so happy that I must tell you so, my beloved and adored one, – the only being on Earth who could give me such heavenly happiness.

"Maurice: there have been, there are, and always will be lovers, but never, never will any woman's heart know so passionate, so tender, so over-mastering a passion as mine for you: everything outside you and my love for you seems dead and soulless.

"Farewell: to-morrow at ten o'clock."

Maurice is ill and Laura writes:

"I spent a dreadful night. I thought about you all the time. I felt all your headaches and your pains and as soon as I awoke my first idea was to send and ask how you were this morning. . . . I am so uneasy. I have not slept all night: it is six o'clock and I am waiting patiently until I

can send to you. I would have been to see you if I had dared. When shall I see you? If not this morning, try to come this evening. If, by chance, I am not there it will be because I have not been able to get out of going to the Opera. I wish you would come. It is a stupid way of seeing each other but it would be better than going on like this."

This invitation is a little unfortunate, or, rather, it hides a trap. The Princess of Sweden and Madame de Flotte were to go to the Opera. No doubt Laura knew this. Maurice, when the suggestion is made thus point-blank, says he is prevented from going: but this leads to trouble.

"You told me at half-past four that you had *not a seat for the Opera.* I met you at 5 o'clock going home. Consequently, in that interval, you could not have made any other engagement. You knew that you were going to *that woman's* box; you knew it, and yet you told me with an air of regret and disappointment, that you were prevented from going."

But Maurice was in no hurry to reply.

"The way in which you pretended to avoid my eyes at the theatre makes me so horribly suspicious: remember that it was pity that gave birth to our feeling for each other, and I have never been so greatly in need of it as I am now. If you had been made to promise you would not see me again, a promise that you certainly ought not to give, it would still be your duty to give me some explanation of this, as of all your conduct. The messenger is to await your answer, if you are in: if you are out, do not keep me too long waiting for it."

Laura, of course, appeals to jealousy, a natural ally of women who are separated by a two hours' journey from the object of their affections. She slips into her letter a short dialogue with a rival unknown to Maurice, and then gently insinuates the name of Forbin, his predecessor, 'the most elegant gentleman in Europe.' Laura wisely makes fun of him a little: and she explains that the information comes from Forbin's sister.

"*Sunday Evening.*

"Maurice, you are everything to me: you are, as you were from the very first, the idol of my heart, the sole object of my thoughts and arbiter of my destiny. But can you take it ill if I refuse to be degraded by this digusting contest between me and a creature whose name ought never to have been mentioned in company with mine? I am sure you do not, and I venture to suppose that you think highly enough of me not to blame me for a pride which is the inevitable consequence of my birth and my education, and above all of what I ought to mean to a man whom I worship as I do you.

"I used those words, Maurice, to a man who loved me deeply and who was very dear to me: yet I was not afraid to tell him that I had never *loved anybody* as I love you. I was not afraid to add that if you forced me to leave you, no one would ever replace you in this heart of mine that so adores you and that you wound so deeply. Ah! Maurice! he saw my tears and he was sorry for me: he did not understand you, but he saw my distress and he nearly cursed you. Except for you, Maurice, you and my children, the world is empty and I will not look at it. Nothing moves me: nothing interests me: I am dead to everything that, at other

times, might have stirred me deeply. Poor Monsieur de F—— was ill for two days on the journey. This piece of news was conveyed to me with a good deal of hostility by his sister whom I went to see yesterday. I don't know what I answered: I hardly listened. You, Maurice, are my world – my sole existence.

"Maurice, I have never ceased to love you for *one minute*. My adoration never failed even when the other day I lay fainting in your arms. Why didn't I breathe my last breath against your heart? The English call it 'dying of a broken heart.' How right they are! How I felt the justice of that phrase that we cannot reproduce in French."

Maurice affected extreme coldness. He met Forbin at Malmaison on Monday, with the Empress Joséphine. He was put on his guard and made some discreet enquiries, to which, no doubt, Forbin to some extent replied. The latter could not resist the temptation of hinting to Maurice, much his junior and now his rival that he, Forbin, still enjoyed Madame Junot's favours. Laura was, or pretended to be, furiously indignant, and asked Maurice to convey a very pointed reply to M. Forbin (this reply has not survived).

"This evening I was obliged to leave the table and shut myself up in my room so as to cry at my ease. My tears fell on to my plate, and my poor children looked at me in troubled astonishment, as if to ask me what was the matter and to reproach me with behaving so when they were by. Oh, Maurice! you have poisoned my life. It is your name alone that is in my mouth, just as it is your image alone that is in my mind. When I answer anyone I am always on the point of bringing you into the conversation. For heaven's sake let me send this reply to F——. I hate to

think of your having anything to do with that man. May I send it? Say yes, and I shall have it sent off a quarter-of-an-hour afterwards.

"*Sunday* 5.0 *a.m.*

"If I have ever had any influence over you, I insist on your reading the enclosed letter very carefully. Read it twice: then seal it up and send it on. I rely on you not to give rise to the slightest suspicion that it comes through you. What I say in it is the exact truth. You have to-day made it quite clear to me that I do not possess your heart and that all your love for me is dead. You have never for one instant ceased to be everything to me: you have been deceived and the most dreadful lies and treacheries have stolen your heart from me. They have succeeded: and we are separated for ever. May you be happy: I hope so, and I shall always be your most affectionate, sincere, and devoted friend.

"You must come and see me to-morrow, Maurice, do not fail. I promise you we will not say anything about all this, shall we?"

Shortly afterwards two people met Forbin in Laura's room. Laura made the first move and told Maurice in a postscript to a long letter of reproaches

"Miserable youth, what are these unworthy suspicions!

"He in whose company you were at Malmaison on Monday, came to see me yesterday morning. I have no idea what he wanted, but to prevent his being able to report to you the slightest word or act that you might dislike, as he has done already, I kept two people in my room, and while you are away I will never receive him once alone."

Laura continued the game of see-saw which had been going on since Aix. She felt that Maurice was very young and she instinctively clung to Forbin.

Girardin, in his *Portraits of* 1810, describes Pauline Borghese's ex-chamberlain. 'He is handsome and distinguished: he has a well-turned foot of which he is very proud. He is very popular and possesses the key to more than one boudoir.'

Forbin was a painter, a writer of songs and something of a soldier – for he had served under Junot in Portugal. Napoleon d'Abrantès who did not like this friend of his mother's is rather amusing on the subject. In speaking of the battle of Vimero, in which his father was defeated and which delivered Portugal over to the English (it has been practically theirs ever since), young d'Abrantès writes ironically.

'It would be difficult to believe that it was fear that induced M. de F. to take up a position in the waggon lines where he was found on the evening of the battle. Doubtless he was occupied in making a sketch. It is true that M. de F. did not expose himself rashly and yet he gave striking proof of his courage in his relations with the Princess (Pauline Bonaparte.)

'She had contracted a somewhat unpleasant malady while in the Colonies, which she had never been able entirely to get rid of: its final manifestation was an open sore on her hand. M. de Forbin, whose social courage was more developed than his military valour, carried his self-denial and his desire to prove his love so far as to imprint an affectionate kiss on the imperious lady's scars. The Princess was foolish enough to boast of the matter. M. de Forbin denied it and said she was wearing a glove.'

The evidence of Napoleon d'Abrantès is suspect. Always short of money, he is probably venting the ill-temper of a disappointed borrower. Forbin was then old and very rich and naturally ill-disposed to lend money.

Laura had already discharged the following elegantly poisoned arrow.

'How charming M. de Forbin was in those days! What wit and talent he had, and indeed numberless qualities with which most men are only partially endowed, but he possessed them all. And he combined a handsome person with all these gifts of Heaven! And now what is left of the Creator's handiwork? The very thought makes me feel quite ill. What a reflection on my conduct!'

But did she deceive Maurice?

To find an answer to this question we must open Laura's private diary. This diary is in some sort a pledge of sincerity that she wished to give to Maurice, since we have found it among his papers. Hence the intentional confusion of the entries, her rather awkward self-justification. Her defence barely hides an admission. In any case it is made gracefully and with the prettiest disingenuousness, in her use of the word 'deceive.'

"He says I deceived him. No, I never did. My heart was always his. Bewildered by despair and broken-hearted from grief, I may have wished to re-unite myself to one whom I had sacrificed for him. Alas, my love was stronger than my purpose. I was choking with sobs in the arms of that scoundrel who has been so inhuman as not to tell Maurice the real truth, though he knows it perfectly well. The wretch knows that Maurice was my only love, he knows

it and he *deceives* him. He describes me as a light woman, capricious and incapable of a real affection; and Maurice believes him. Oh! What will become of me?"

The defence was clever, but Maurice, urged no doubt by everyone at Mortefontaine, decided to break off their relations and told Laura that he had not been taken in.

"This morning you made me suffer more than I have ever done in my life. My unhappy heart is torn and broken – and God alone knows with what justice! Listen, Maurice: this is perhaps the turning point of my life. You must be serious in so important a matter. Do not take an empty pride in torturing a heart that is so sensitive and so easy to wound. If you love another, tell me, – indeed I strongly suspect it. Otherwise you could not have repulsed me thus. If it is so . . . Ah, Maurice, may she never make you feel the pain and misery you have made me suffer!

"If you have made up your mind to be the most ungrateful of men, and to forget so happy and so exquisite a time, burn my letters and destroy your recollections of me. Preserve only the hatred, the aversion that I inspire in you. O Heaven, must we meet upon such terms?

"My tears choke me, and since you left I have not been able to shed a single one: they flow back upon my heart and burn and poison it. How can I shed them? There is no hand to wipe them away.

"Answer at once: my condition will not endure any delay."

Finally, in one of the only dated letters that we have of hers, Laura writes to Maurice again, three years later, about

the emotional complications of the beginning of their liaison. In 1815 Forbin was a very important personage, Director of the National Museums. He was setting out to ransack Europe for antiques for Louis XVIII. He was meeting with a success as a painter that his choice of assistants had well deserved.

"*12th November*, 1815.

"I know nothing more devastating than hope deferred! For the last week I have been expecting you every morning. I say to myself: 'He will come this evening.' The evening comes, but you do not. My dear one, I must tell you a little story that will amuse you. Up to the present I have been feeling too ill to think about it. Two or three days after I came back I got the enclosed letter from M. de Forbin. You know I have heard nothing from him for a year, and you remember all the charming things he used to say about me. So I was highly surprised to get this letter. I could not think what had induced him to write 'that I never said or did anything that was not kind.' This accords very ill with 'the sentimental toad.' But I think I can guess. The fellow has never abandoned his intention of being revenged on me (witness the scene in the library?). He heard you had gone, and he thought it an easy matter to present himself as soon as you had left; the master-stroke was to try and get me to visit him, under no matter what pretext. But I guessed what he was at. I wrote a reply that he said 'must have been kept on ice,' and, as you may imagine, I haven't set foot in his house and shall not, without you, that I swear.

"My beloved, what the fellow has just done must convince you of my innocence at the beginning of our love.

What tenacity and perseverance! The picture has been finished for three months: for three months all Paris has been going to see it, and he chooses the precise moment of your departure to invite me to come and look at it. And, in any case, what is the meaning of this invitation to go to his house? Perhaps to make an opportunity for a quarrel. Ah, I know him too well, and to my cost. His infernal tricks had too direct an influence on my happiness for me to let myself be caught a second time. A serpent only bites you once. When you know the hedge where it lurks you do not pass that way again.

"Farewell, dear Maurice. I hope your first letter may announce your arrival. What an admirable little dinner I will have ready for you! How warm it will be in my drawing-room, and how fresh the flowers! Everyone will be happy, for my dear will have come."

But to return to 1812. Maurice who began to be already worn out by his mistress's repeated attacks proposed a brotherly friendship, the *modus vivendi* of weak lovers who wish to break off gently.

"Yes, you are right. Let us be friends, brother and sister, since you wish it, and no more. An hour ago I learnt everything, and I now know *to whom* and *to what* you are sacrificing me. Now, all is at an end, and this is the last letter you will ever get from me. As long as I could believe that it was an unjust suspicion that was keeping you away from me, I did all I could to get you back, because, loving you passionately as I did, and unable to bear being unjustly suspected, I wanted to prevent a miserable mistake ruining our happiness. Now that I know *the truth*, I am too proud

to bring myself to utter a word of reproach or anything that might suggest that I could forget who I am and what is due to me so far as to wish to reconquer a heart which could not appreciate mine.

"Please send my letters back. I do not distrust you: Heaven forfend that I should mistrust a man whom I have worshipped and whom I look upon as a brother and a friend: but you are too much under the influence of a woman who is pledged to hate me. She cannot help herself, for at a certain moment, led by some gust of feeling or caprice, you left her for me: and believe your friend, Maurice, that is one of the things that women never forgive. I am quite sure of you: but you are too much under her influence, you fear her or love her too much to refuse what she asks you, and sooner or later my peace of mind will be endangered or destroyed. So you must send my letters back: they cannot be of any value to you: they can only contain the expression of feelings which must now be painful to you, for they put you in the wrong.

"Come and see me. You need not be apprehensive of the subject of our conversations, nothing shall recall the past. I am myself too anxious to forget it, ever to allow any word of mine to bring it before you. You must remember that the entire cessation of your visits may do me a good deal of harm in view of the rumours that have already gone about. Tell *her* whom *you love* that she need not be uneasy: I am too proud to share anything with her and too kind to rob her of a heart that has sacrificed so much for her.

"Farewell, farewell to love for ever, but I shall always be your faithful friend:

"farewell, farewell.

Do not send the letters here: I will send to fetch them tomorrow at 9 o'clock unless you would rather bring them yourself."

Laura staged that vital meeting well. Everything must have been satisfactorily settled since the correspondence continued without interruption. It is more than probable, in any case, that Laura was clever enough to effect a reconciliation between Maurice and Forbin, since in her Memoirs she speaks of an evening when Forbin came to read a composition of his before a select company. He was said to have collaborated with Laborde in the words of the famous lyric: *Partant pour la Syrie*, of which the music was in the name of Queen Hortense, – an extremely doubtful ascription of maternity – and Forbin took a good deal of second-hand credit for this. 'This distinguished gentleman,' says Chateaubriand contemptuously, 'who owed his artistic credentials to the Revolution, was the originator of the grotesque get-up that has become characteristic of the profession.'

Laura awoke Maurice's jealousy by using a convenient though dangerous weapon. To keep it alive and active something further was necessary. She naturally thought of Metternich. A serious rivalry between Maurice, prospective Chamberlain at Mortefontaine, and the all-powerful Metternich, now at Vienna, was out of the question. Thus there were no complications to be feared, and it would be a salutary reflection for Maurice during the long evenings at Mortefontaine, to compare Laura, dragging at her chariot wheels one of the arbiters of the world, with the Flotte woman, a nobody, the only aspirant for whose favours was

General Cervoni 'who looked rather like père Duchesne better dressed than usual.'[1]

But we must go back a little.

Metternich was Austrian Ambassador in France from 1806 to 1809. His stay in Paris changed the destinies of the world.

This young man of thirty-three held his country's precarious fortunes in his hand. In three years he saw Napoleon destroy Prussia and then share Europe with the Emperor Alexander, while the English guns were booming in Spain. At the moment of his arrival in France in 1806, Austria with much diminished territories had practically become a second-class power. In 1809, on the eve of Wagram, Metternich anticipated an immediate defeat for his country but he had become virtually certain of a victory of another kind, decisive this time. Metternich, as he tells us in his Memoirs, 'knew his ground by then.'

The idea of getting the better of the soldier otherwise than by force of arms had gradually taken shape in the diplomat's mind. Metternich had been present at the birth of the problem of the succession to the new Imperial throne. This problem had become, by 1809, a matter of life and death for Napoleon, now that he was certain that he could have an heir, which had been proved by the birth of his child by one of the ladies-in-waiting of his sister Caroline Murat. Metternich realized that the Emperor would divorce his wife; a suitable marriage . . . Austrian for instance, and the wedding ring would be in the monster's nose.

M. Hanotaux has recently described in his masterly

[1] A generic name for the bourgeois of Paris at the period of the Revolution. (Translator's note.)

fashion how the Choiseul party, which had gone to ground under the Terror, took the helm again after Thermidor, and kept it under the protection of Bonaparte and subsequently of Napoleon. It was the tradition of the Choiseul party that always imposed an Austrian marriage on the Ruler, – Marie Antoinette or Marie Louise. It was Talleyrand who had secured Metternich's appointment as Austrian ambassador, Talleyrand, incarnation of the Choiseul party, who had come from Orléans and was to return thither under Louis-Philippe.

Metternich denies in his Memoirs that he arranged the marriage of Marie Louise. He is anxious to spare Austrian amour-propre. It was at a masked ball, he says, that Napoleon made known that he was matrimonially inclined to an Arch-Duchess. Metternich was then Foreign Minister in Vienna. He expressed his amazement, his embarrassment, and the pretended repugnance of the Emperor Francis to such a proposal. At the time of Marie Louise's marriage to Napoleon Metternich writes as follows:

'If I were saviour of the world I could not receive sincerer tributes and congratulations on the part that people are sure I have played in this affair. In the honours shortly to be distributed I shall get the Fleece: *that will not be for nothing.*' Thus, when Metternich arrived in Paris in 1806, shortly after Austerlitz and shortly before Jena, his orders were to make himself agreeable. He had a marvellous success at Court. He had all the ease and charm of good society with which the Austrian nobility is traditionally endowed. His demeanour was suitably serious. He never smiled. It is true that he had very bad teeth, at least Caroline Murat reports that he had, and she was in a good position to know.

Count Golowkin describes him for us. 'Well-made, well-

dressed, very fair and of a very pale complexion, he had an abstracted air which women thought romantic and men thought deep: the ensemble, however, was unmistakably Teutonic.'

Metternich's company was eagerly sought after at official entertainments. In the Faubourg St. Germain he was dreaded and not at ease. On whom was the handsome Clement to cast those pale blue eyes of his? He hesitated and at last he found someone at once profitable and pleasant; it was Madame Junot. With a little ingenuity he could get private information as to what was going on at the Tuileries, and thanks to her husband who was fighting in Portugal he could find out all she knew about the Peninsular, that supreme hope of the Coalition.

The Comte Louis de Narbonne effected the introduction.

The comic part of the adventure is the profound contempt which Metternich had for Madame la Duchesse d'Abrantès' nobility. In his Memoirs he lets fall this contemptuous remark: 'It may be mentioned that the *genuine* Marquis d'Abrantès has been hanging about Paris with a Portuguese deputation.'

Laura was living in a country cottage called St. James, at Neuilly. Metternich took a house near by. A grotto near the Seine was their meeting-place. Laura always maintained a kind of religious admiration for Metternich just as certain Greek women, her ancestors, preserved the memory of a god, who had possessed them for a fleeting moment.

Chapter V

In 1809 Metternich left for Austria, and shortly afterwards Junot came back from Spain. Junot had been the lover of Caroline Murat, and Caroline and Laura hated each other as heartily as they had once been friends. Moreover, Caroline was delighted to be able to tell Junot about his matrimonial misfortunes. When the 'Duke' refused to believe her, the Queen of Naples pointed out the desk in which Laura kept Metternich's letters. Once he had got possession of written proofs of his wrongs the Duke was so ill-advised as to raise a frightful scandal. On two occasions he even tried to assassinate his wife. But the Emperor restored order with a frown and the Empress-mother reconciled the parties.

'What could I do: I forgave him,' says Laura: and indeed she wrote an account of these events, which has been published in part by that learned and amiable gentleman M. Turquan.

But we must return to our 'blond sheep.' The Metternich of 1812, the Princely arbiter of Europe, as he was to be, awaited his opportunity. Laura for her part had forgotten nothing of 'the blood tragedy of which she had so nearly been a victim.' She writes to Maurice:

"Something once happened to me that I must tell you about: my life must have no secrets from you.

"At the time of the wretched scandal that my husband made three years ago over Monsieur de M . . ., he took possession, as you know, of all his letters, but I had certain other papers which, without containing any reference to our liaison, were dear to me as having come from someone

that I loved. I made them into a parcel and, enclosing with them a lock of hair and a ring, I sent it to one of his friends whom I could absolutely trust. This friend was away from Paris and has been living on his estate in Flanders since that time. He has just died and his lawyer yesterday brought to my house a package containing what I had sent. I destroyed the ring, and burnt the hair and several of the documents: I have only kept two which I want to show you. One of them is my Moral Portrait[1]: I don't know if you will think it is like me: and the other is a translation from Goethe called 'Evening.'

"Do not think, Maurice, that I was wrong to burn and destroy these relics of an old affection. I loved M. de M . . . His memory is dear to me, but at this moment everything that reminds me that in the course of my life I may have committed faults that have raised an impassable barrier between us, is hateful to me. I weep for my past sins in tears of blood.

"Ah, Maurice, my regrets and my remorse make me feel most bitterly that I was meant to be virtuous: if I had met you earlier I should have loved none but you, and my love would have saved me from myself. My beloved! whatever my past faults have been my great love for you has wiped them out. Love for you has purified my heart and I feel that I am worthy to inspire and ask for love.

"Good-bye. I am going to bed, sad at thinking that I shall get up to-morrow and shall not see you."

And it so happened that, by skilful management, his 'Portrait of Adèle' fell into the hands of Madame de Flotte.

[1] The 'Portrait of Adèle' preceding Chapter I.

"*Monday: midnight.*

"At last I am by myself: I can read your letter again and again and talk to you without fear of interruption. There seems to have been a conspiracy this evening not to leave me a moment's freedom.

"I am very glad you have got my letter back. I was not nervous about it because my regard for you is well known. The use that she might make of it could not cause us any alarm, but a weapon, however harmless, may always be dangerous in the hands of someone ill-disposed, and that Madame de F . . . most certainly is, in word and deed. So I am not at all anxious to leave my 'portrait' in her possession. God knows why the malicious creature wanted to keep it: it can hardly be for the pleasure of reading an account of my perfections. I suspect other, and much less peaceful, intentions. I ask her pardon for entertaining such an opinion of her, but I think the woman who can stoop to incur the contempt of a whole household by breaking a seal and abstracting a letter, in a word, by intruding upon the most sacred matters, would not stick at forgery. '*It was love that made me do it*,' she will say to any remonstrance: and she will think by this reply to justify the most detestable conduct: and it is *for love* that she threatens to ruin your life if you do not return to her. It is *for love* that in an access of rage she covers you with the coarsest insults. It is *for love* that she dares to tell a man who has been her lover that he is a coward and without *honour*. Ah, Maurice, surely such conduct should make you openly avoid her company. But even admitting, though I do not believe it, that love is at the bottom of all this, is it such a love that should move your good and noble heart? Do you not blush a hundred times a day at being dragged in the mire by the detestable

addresses of – whom? A woman, and a woman who hopes to be the object of your choice. And this woman pretends to love you! No, it is not love: no grief nor anger could wish to degrade the beloved. The hatred that springs sometimes from jealousy may last a few moments: it may give utterance to a few stinging words but that is all. Believe me, Maurice, I know what it is to *love you.* I know, and I venture to assert that I know it better than she does. *I also know what it is to suffer at your hands*, and never has the slightest reproach fallen from my lips or entered my thoughts. When I thought to die for you I felt I wanted to raise you above yourself, and that is a feeling natural to love. At this moment I don't think there exists in the entire universe anyone who could offer me the slightest compensation if I were to lose you. For me you are a being who reigns in my heart as one divine, whom I worship like a god, and this is the way in which I have always looked upon you and thought of you, even in the midst of the pain and sorrow that you have caused me. Yes, my dear; if you plunged a knife in my heart and my blood was necessary to save your life I would enlarge the wound so that it might flow the faster, and, far from complaining, I would bless you with my last sigh for so relying on my love for you.

"Maurice, believe me: true love is the privilege of fine and noble natures. Smaller souls cannot experience this emotion in all its fulness and with all its magnificent qualities. You may know it, my beloved: but take care lest she who is to be your fate does not. Place your hand upon your Laura's heart: there you will find the love that is your due.

"Good-bye. I am going to bed to think about you and to dream that I have held you in my arms. Yet I have a great deal more to say to you. Just imagine that young Alfred

de M . . .[1] forced his way into my house in the absurdest manner. He said, as he came into the room, that seeing the courtyard full of carriages he had come in and he had told my 'concierge' at the door that he had my permission. When he had gone I had Manette fetched and told him what I thought of him in front of everybody. What a way to behave!"

Madame de Flotte proves to Maurice that Laura has given herself away, that Metternich never condescended to write a portrait-sketch of the 'little plague.' Madame de Flotte concentrated on what she had guessed to be Laura's weak point: her literary pride.

"*Wednesday morning: noon.*

"I only *believed* her malicious but now I am concerned to discover that she is rather stupid. It is indeed a brilliant notion to suggest I wrote the portrait *myself*. I suppose it was likewise *I* who persuaded the author he had been in love with me for two years: and I suppose it is all a dream. She must think me very clever. I authorize you to tell her that I have the original in Monsieur de M . . .'s *own handwriting*. I will not leave in her envious little soul the insignificant pleasure of being in the right.

"I wrote to you last night, before I went to bed, a letter that you will get at the same time as this. To-day I shall get some further information about the whole matter. The wife of the latest arrival has been by no means sparing in her remarks about us, and you have consented to expose me

[1] This would appear to be Alfred de Maussion, who was Prefect of the Palace at the Court of Napoleon III. In 1812 he was a highly enterprising young gentleman, to whom Princess Pauline had given a sapphire which is entered in her accounts as having cost 780 frs.

to this sort of thing! This is the society in which you daily abase yourself, forgetting who you are, your name, and your place in the world. Maurice, Maurice, you must raise your head once more. Do your duty nobly, as you must, but do no more than that. Believe me, the general opinion of your conduct depends mostly on how you are spoken of in your own house. The woman is notorious, and no one can understand that a man of your name and rank can be so abject a slave to a creature of this kind, in matters that do not concern your duty. I feel bitterly about this, as you see, but what I know, I am so certain of, that I cannot help being disgusted. My dear one, I feel now how much I love you; far from being offended by all that has happened, I am more deeply attached to you than ever. My most beloved Maurice, come and see me soon; let me see your precious eyes looking into mine, let me hear your dear voice saying that you love me. It is only those moments in which I am alive. It is only then that I thank Heaven for having given me a heart to love you and a voice to tell you so until the last day of my life.

"Good-bye. I dare not say how much I long to see you, but it is almost beyond endurance. If only you could get away for one hour! I know the weather is dreadful, but that would make it all the more kind and considerate of you! How fervently I should take you in my arms! Come soon, Maurice, come soon : if you loved me, you would be with your Laura a few hours after you get this letter.

"Good-bye. A thousand kisses.

"Although I was not responsible for my own portrait, I have as much talent as most people. I send you a little sketch that I wrote in ten minutes.

"Good-bye once more, my dear.

"THE PORTRAIT OF GRACIEUSE[1]

"I was sitting quietly the other day in the Tuileries Gardens, when I saw an acquaintance of mine pass by, walking very rapidly. 'Where are you going?' I said. 'I am worn out,' said he: 'for the last two hours I have been running after a woman whom I must positively see (for no one else will do), and yet I cannot come up with her.'

" 'I have been here some time,' I went on; 'perhaps I may have seen her pass. Describe her – is she young?' [1]

" 'No.'

" 'Pretty?'

" 'No.'

" 'Has she a good figure?'

" 'No; she stoops a great deal and walks very much as I do.'

" 'What sort of eyes?'

" 'Small, and rather bloodshot.'

" 'And her teeth?'

[1] This portrait of Madame de Flotte, whom Laura ironically calls Gracieuse, seems to clear up a minor historical point which has hitherto baffled research. According to Masson, Madame de Flotte, who was of Greek extraction, was the widow of a Naval Officer who was responsible for the disorders in Rome in 1793, in which Basseville was killed. This Charles de Flotte was the nephew of Admiral de Flotte, who was murdered at Toulon in 1793. He himself died at Seville in 1806, leaving four children completely destitute. According to Madame d'Arjuzon, author of a study of Queen Hortense and very well informed on the period, Madame de Flotte was supposed to be a natural daughter of the Prince of Nassau, called Pholoe. She too was Greek but much younger than the foregoing, since she was still at Madame Campan's establishment in 1811. Madame d'Arjuzon's opinion has hitherto been shared by many historians. . . . Nevertheless the above portrait seems rather to favour Masson's view.

" 'Even less prepossessing than her eyes.'

" 'Bosom?'

" 'Neither beautiful nor ugly: she has none.'

" 'Skin?'

" 'Dreadful: much pitted with smallpox.'

" 'Well, my friend: after all you have said, the object of your search would appear to be a *little compendium of heavenly marvels*. I must at least hope that her good sense and breeding, her manners and her talents make one forget that the time of her youth and beauty is past. She is doubtless very pleasant company?'

" 'No, not exactly,' answered Ariste, with an embarrassed air: 'and to speak frankly, that is not at all why I cannot do without her. You know I have too much good taste to find a woman pleasant who talks loud enough to deafen you, and invariably in a *delightful Provençal accent*, swearing and cursing at the slightest contradiction, and often giving way to the most elegant exhibitions of violence, such as kicks and blows and other equally polite conduct. Through the torrent of verbiage with which she overwhelms you, a ray of sense may sometimes be distinguished, but hardly of a kind that one would welcome in one's wife, one's sister, one's mistress, or one's friend.

" 'This is perhaps enough to give you an idea of her breeding, her good sense and her manners. As for talents I don't think she has any, except possibly in her capacity for successful wickedness, and her knowledge of all the little devices that go with it such as, unfastening letters, writing anonymous ones, forging signatures, bribing servants, barefaced lying, and a neglect of any sort of shame or restraint when she wants to ruin someone. I have a wife who is giving me a good deal of trouble. I am going

to set Gracieuse after her and in a week she will be sorry she has offended me. But here she is: I must rush after her: forgive me if I leave you.'

"Ariste left me forthwith and I watched him go up to a tall, angular, dried-up looking woman, a few steps away, who invited him to sit down beside her. When Ariste had accosted her, her expression had a sort of ill-humour and moroseness about it that one could see she meant to be taken for melancholy, but while Ariste was talking, her look changed to one of gaiety. It was the infernal smile of Satan when the prospect of destroying the first man was put before him. As the conversation grew more animated, Gracieuse's face became more and more repulsive. Her eyes and her mouth seemed to combine to think and express what is evil. The sight made me feel quite ill. I got up and went away quickly."

"Wednesday: 5 p.m.

"I have just re-read your letter of this morning and I must confess that this woman's folly is beyond me. She says that the portrait is by *me* and this singular circumstance makes her wish to keep it. Poor wretch! Her stupidity makes me sorry for her. Does this portrait contain such exaggerated phrases that a man who loved me as much as he did could not have been responsible for it? I am sorry for her, but this is a very clumsy way of hiding her envy, her jealousy, and wounded pride. I am quite sure that if I asked M. de M——, Alphonse, Charles, or Alexandre,[1] to draw her portrait, on condition that they became her lovers for

[1] 'Alphonse' cannot be identified. 'Charles' is Flahaut, protégé of Queen Hortense. 'Alexandre' is Girardin, father of Émile de Girardin who will come into the story a little later.

twenty-four hours only, not one of them would consent: to save their good taste, they would sacrifice the pleasure of writing a page or two of well-considered malice. I assure you, Maurice, that a time will come when you will blush for having been in love with such an old ruin, who must make you constantly afraid of being buried under the *rubbish of her wickedness*.

"*She says she is fond of you*, does she? I can well believe it. You are hardly to be compared with General Cervoni,[1] who was rather like Père Duchesne better dressed than usual, or a bank clerk from Marseilles. Once she has lost you how on earth can she replace you? If it had been possible you may be sure she would have done it already. Septeuil,[2] not at all a bad kind of man, suggested himself for an interlude, *warning her that he loved another woman*. 'However if you are agreeable,' said he, 'I am at your orders.' What a romantic declaration! What sort of opinion can he have of a woman to address her in this way? Yet she did not resist this unceremonious admirer and she made in his favour a considerable breach in a constancy which began to look like that of the Matron of Ephesus. My poor Maurice, I am *sick at heart* when I think that you

[1] Corsican by birth, and a friend from childhood of the Bonaparte and the Clary families, he had for some time been Governor of Marseilles, and that is no doubt when he became acquainted with Madame de Flotte, perhaps in the Clary circle. 'He was fond of women,' said a contemporary, 'and successful with them: and he remained a friend when the affair was over.' When he succeeded in being relieved of a post to which he had been appointed as the result of misconduct, and was sent to the front, he had his head carried away by a cannon-ball.

[2] A notorious character, who shared with his friend Canonville the favours of Princess Pauline Borghese. Both were exiled by the Emperor and sent to Spain, where Septeuil lost a leg.

have been dominated by such a creature. I am only speaking for your good, believe me. I am sure she does not realize her insignificance. Poor creature! She is no great success as a wicked woman. She ought to be made of much sterner stuff for that.

"By the way, you may tell her that if she persists in believing that my portrait is by me, and if she wants to keep it as a very *remarkable document*, I am very sorry, but I shall be obliged to undeceive her, and tell her that even if this was the case I am in a large and excellent company. My first example might be Mademoiselle de l'Epinay who is my superior in ability just as I am hers. That is a well-known piece, though perhaps she does not know it, for I fancy she is more given to thinking and devising folly than to reading good literature. Anyhow, here it is: do as you like with it. If its wit and originality give you a moment's amusement I shall be rewarded for my trouble in copying it out.

" 'Good Heavens,' someone said to me the other day, 'have I lived to see a rivalry between you and Madame Fl . . .! My poor Laura! You so brilliant and so fashionable, so adulated and sought after! Poor little yacht driven by the storm against that ancient hulk![1] I hope you are cured of your vanity: how transitory are all human affairs. It is a true saying that human life is the oddest thing of all!' And they all burst out laughing once more, so much so that I could not help joining in. But my amusement did not last long. I soon remembered all the harm she had done to me and all she wants to do to me, and to you as well. 'If only,' I said to myself, 'if only she was merely ridiculous! But she is wicked, Maurice, she is a wicked woman, and I

[1] A play upon Madame de Flotte's name.

maintain that in continuing your relations with her, you are doing your heart as much wrong as your mind and your judgment. You did not need 'permission' to come and comfort your sick friend: did you not come twice six weeks ago? But we will say no more about it: it is my lot to suffer and to weep. I hope my melancholy life will not endure such a condition for very long. I was wrong to ask a service that might be prevented by a little wind or rain. I, who am but a weak woman, should not have minded, but then my love is strong. I will lay your kind dear letter against my heart. You tell me so handsomely that you love me, that I believe you, I must believe you. Pray God to spare my life, Maurice, pray earnestly. I should indeed be an object of pity if I could no longer love you.

"You must be a sort of kindly providence towards me. Happiness and sorrow can only come to me through you, through you alone and through my children. They are all of them round me and make me happy. It is from your hands alone, I repeat, that I look for everything that may make my poor heart joyful or sad.

"Farewell, my beloved, farewell, my dearest angel. I press you to my heart, that is so wholly yours.

"Farewell, I love you.

"Why has not the Q. (queen) answered me?"

Madame de Flotte's secret machinations are revealed in the last line of this letter: Queen Julie, always royally punctual, had not answered Laura.

Laura insisted on Maurice's presence. But Maurice practically held the position of Chamberlain, and the Queen covertly insisted on a breach with Laura. As at Aix, Julie did nothing unless impelled to it by Madame de Flotte. In

the following letter we can see for the first time the shadow of the Emperor and the terror evoked by the mere mention of his name. Napoleon was still in Russia. Laura made fun of him: after all she knew him too well and could well afford to defy him openly. Throwing all prudence to the winds, she wrote the following letter on official notepaper stamped with the watermark of the Imperial Eagle on one side, and on the other the Master's profile and the inscription, 'Napoleon, Emperor of the French and King of Italy.'

"I must positively see you and speak to you. To-night at one o'clock I shall be at your house. If you wish to give me a final proof of your affection, spare me the risks of such a journey by night, and be in your carriage, at a given time, at the corner of the Rue de la Concorde, without your servant. If you refuse I shall go out alone with Orry or Vaspard and I shall come and find you wherever you may be. Think of what I am going through. You alone can save me. Be careful of your answer. Remember that I can quite easily leave the house without its being known, even by God Himself. You must not answer: I will not have it. At one o'clock by the Rue de la Concorde. Perhaps I may not be there exactly at the hour, but about a quarter of an hour later. If you are not there, think of my feelings, but in any case I shall not hesitate to go to your house.

"Good-bye: till this evening.

"I know better than you what the Emperor thinks. He never says anything about his sister's intrigues, what difference can mine make to him? None, and that is the truth. Remember that Madame F. has the ear of the Queen, and that you are allowing yourself to be frightened for nothing.

"Good-bye once more: until this evening."

Maurice came to the rendezvous, for three days later Laura writes:

"*Saturday noon.*

"Always waiting, always longing, and always in despair, that is the story of my life. I might well have thought on leaving you that you would never again torment me, and yet I have not had a word from you for three days. I should have thought that your recollection of me and what passed would have been ineffaceable: I should have thought you would have been more than ever convinced of the truth and strength of my affection and would attach some value to that precious gift: for no one will ever love you as I do. . . .

"I gave my jeweller yesterday some settings for the necklaces of coloured stone, and this device preceded by your name, 'Sweet remembrance, present joy, only future hope."

Before the Russian campaign such vast numbers of men had never, in modern times, left France for such a distance: and the fashion for keepsakes had become all the rage. Every woman had 'someone' with the army: all the young men carried with them the symbol of somebody's affection. These 'souvenirs' ranged from a simple ring to a miniature enclosed in its shagreen case lined with red velvet. For the ladies the jewellers had devised the ingenious notion of necklaces made of coloured stones. The alphabet was made up of twenty-four stones beginning with different letters. The amethysts for words beginning with A, beryl for the letter B, cornelian for the letter C, and so on: every woman wore one of these amorous acrostics round her neck.

The same day, Laura wrote another letter.

"*Tuesday*, 9.0 *evening.*

"All myself is in you, in my idea of you, my memories of you, all this fills up my life when you are away from me, and the device in my necklace which I spoke to you about this morning, isn't it quite true? 'Sweet remembrance, present joy, only future hope.'

"I am quite ill: yesterday I had to take double my dose of opium[1] and in spite of that I could not sleep. How can I sleep with my heart and my blood in such a constant tumult? Ah, Maurice, my condition is wearing me out and killing me. Never to see you, always to love you, to spend a part of one's life in lamenting and regretting him whom one adores: that is surely enough to wear me out and to destroy me.

"You need not be anxious, as far as HE is concerned. There are two things that will keep me safe – my love and yours: my heart does not feel, my eye does not see, and my ear does not hear anything but what comes to me from you. Ah! my dear, when you love your Laura, and when she passionately adores you, who is there who could reach my heart with a single word of love?

"Farewell, my dear. I hold you to my heart and kiss your lovely eyes.

"Farewell. A thousand more kisses, and especially on your left eye, – is not that the one that was hurt?"

Laura, who has been brought up on *Werther*, sends her lover a pair of pistols. . . .

"To-day honour bids you be my champion. Have I not

[1] Laura had recourse to narcotics all her life : she mentions the fact in more than one passage in her Memoirs. When she died she owed her apothecary more than 200 frs. for opium.

armed you as my knight? Was not the war-cry of your ancestors – *God, Honour, and My Lady*? You may well proclaim me yours, Maurice, they would not be ashamed of me. I will never lead you elsewhere than in the path of honour, and if you should ever falter, I would urge you forward. So I have sent a pair of pistols, the finest I have ever seen, to be put in order, and when they are ready I shall beg your acceptance of them."

The pistols which Laura sent to be 'put in order'[1] had a history. We have discovered the origin of these pistols in rather a rare book in which Laura narrates her adventures in Spain.

'M. d'Abrantès was, as is well known, an amazing pistol-shot, indeed he has never been equalled before or since.

'One day a sort of contest was held, the prize being a magnificent pair of pistols made at Versailles. M. de Lions and M. d'Abrantès were the only competitors. M. de Lions cut twelve successive balls on the blade which served as a target.

'M. d'Abrantès won. On every occasion his ball was split on the exact middle of the knife and in the exact middle of the ball itself.'

[1] These pistols are still to be seen, but the stones that encrusted them have been removed. Perhaps that is what Laura meant.

Chapter VI

In the course of December occurred the surprise – and what a surprise! – that Laura was keeping for Maurice. Whether he will or no he is now definitely attached to Laura.

"Maurice, Maurice, I cannot tell you all my joy. My hopes are perhaps slight, but there they are, and I have some reasons for them. If only it were true! May God let me live long enough to know such joy for a few hours and then let me die! You will believe me mad, but think of *what I wish for more than anything in the world*, and tell me, if things are as I have good grounds for believing, whether I have not the right to go crazy.

"Good-bye, my beloved one. I press you to my heart, and I, too, tell you once more that your head should lie there for the rest of your life."

'*Union or Death.*' Alas it was the ring itself that was partly to assist in realizing the prediction engraved upon the golden circlet.

"Dear, you can do me a great service, and I hope you will not refuse. I want you to bring me my ring this evening because I cannot pass the night without it. As I was coming in to-day and taking off my gloves, my wedding-ring came off, being, as you know, extremely large for me, and I cannot find it. As I did not leave my room I shall no doubt have it to-morrow, but in the meantime I should have to spend a night without my ring and, superstitious as I am, I should be dreadfully miserable."

Maurice could not bring the ring because it was being

worn by Madame de Flotte. Laura was informed of this in a letter, doubtless from a female friend.

"At four o'clock I received the enclosed letter. It is now seven and I have not been able to shed a single tear. My heart is still oppressed by the pain I felt when I read it. I feel stifled and I am in such agony that I think that I shall die.

"Maurice, I throw myself at your feet and I beg you to tell me the truth about all this. If you are guilty, confess it. There is much love in my heart and I can forgive anything, even a deception which would degrade me in your eyes. Tell me what induced you to put the ring into that woman's hands? What could have been the reason? I know not what to think, and every moment, every reflexion, brings me fresh distress. I hate to accuse you, to suspect you, but what can I do or say against such evidence? It all fits in so well with what she said three weeks ago. Tell me the truth, for Heaven's sake, tell me the truth! I ask it of you as one might ask God to spare one's life. If you will not, then I am determined to see her. My state of mind is frightful and I cannot endure it. I must get some sort of peace or meet the death that must be mine if you really have been false to me. And at what a time, O Heaven, am I betrayed: when last evening, this night and this morning I had at last *positive indications of another life within me*. The state that I have been in for the last four hours is the merest agony. My forehead is covered with cold sweat. My heart is broken and yet I cannot weep. What harm that woman has done to me! Ah! Maurice, unless you are the most unworthy creature, she must be a monster. Again I ask you, for the love of Heaven, – the truth. I will believe you, indeed I must.

This unhappy love of mine is all my life. My reason is gone. I wanted to go and see you myself, but a movement of this unhappy child kept me back: it condemns me to live when its father bids me die.

"Answer clearly and in detail about this unhappy affair. If you could see me you would be very sorry for me. I hope to Heaven the blow may not prove mortal in my present condition. Good-bye: my servant is ready. He will await your answer, but, once more – the truth! Oh, Maurice, you whom I have loved so much, whom I even now adore so deeply, is it possible that you could have been false to me!"

Honour, if not love, bade Maurice be discreet.

"*Wednesday* 10 *a.m.*

"I have just been interrupted by my children. How weak I am! I have been crying bitterly over them and over myself. Your letter threw me into despair. I am ruined for ever if what that woman is so wickedly spreading about may be believed, and especially if you do not defend me as warmly as you are bound in honour to do. I do not speak of love, Maurice, but regard for my reputation, at the moment, should be as sacred to you as if it were your sister's. Think of the circumstances in which I find myself, and the dreadful consequences that might result. Good God, what would become of me, if you were guilty of the slightest indiscretion? Alas, my love was my only crime, but the world will never forgive it me, and to crown my misery, I cannot attend upon the Empress-Mother.[1] I am in bed, and I cannot leave it at the moment. I am beginning to spit blood."

[1] Laura was honorary lady-in-waiting to the Empress-Mother.

Maurice once again pleads not guilty. No doubt he mislaid the ring that Madame de Flotte is displaying as a trophy.

"You tell me you are not guilty and I believe you. But how that woman has injured me! I have felt so ill since yesterday that I scarcely have the strength to stand up. My friend, is it possible that a woman's heart can contain so much wickedness? You are innocent, I can ignore her rage. She is powerless: my heart is proof against all attacks except those that come from you. You love me, and that is enough. Your love is my universe: I despise the rest. Yes, in spite of my anxiety, I am proud to say that an inner voice told me, in the depths of my heart, that you were not guilty of this last infamy. Such conduct should indeed be beneath you. No, you have not betrayed me. I believe it, I am sure – and I do so want to be! Maurice, is it too much if I ask you never again to address a word to that creature?

"Good-bye, my dear: I love you, and I kiss you a thousand times."

Maurice, growing more and more weary, remains obdurate, and declares that in any case he can only come once a week.

"You know me, and you know that when I am away from you the merest hint upsets me, and your wretched silence plunges me into feverish despair. Come and see me two hours after this letter reaches you or I swear by all I hold most sacred that to-morrow morning, with the dawn, I shall take the road to Mortefontaine.

"I daresay there are affections that are capable of cold reflection. Mine is not. At this very moment I am coming

back into my room, frozen, yet with my brain on fire. I have spent an hour before the altar in my oratory: the floor is wet with my tears: I cried aloud to Heaven and asked God to send you to me: He seemed to tell me to summon you. Come to me, Maurice, come. It is seven days, *seven centuries* since I saw you.

"Come: do not drive me to despair. Pity a poor wretched woman whose only crime is to adore you and whose unhappy love has quite disturbed her reason.

"Come, and let me see you: come, and give me courage to endure another week away from you.

"Come: 'tis all I ask and all I cry for.

"It is one o'clock and you have not come: you will not come now: you have not had pity on the state in which you have left me. Imagine how I feel now, and the night that I shall pass.

"For the last time listen to me. You want my blood and you shall have it. I have managed to get a dose of opium large enough to kill me in an hour. My household kept watch on me, but in vain, and I have it now in my possession. A despair like mine can evade everybody. Do you believe that the calm appearing in my face comes truly from my heart? I am in despair and am determined to die. I have the means at hand and no one can take it from me. Say one word and you will be my murderer. At this moment I am as irresponsible as I was on Friday. I feel that so wild a passion must seem exaggerated, and yet I do not say all that is in my heart. The love that fills it burns and destroys me even more surely than the poison that I see in front of me. Maurice, my lover, my friend, my idol, my fate is in your hands. I worship you and I will do everything except

not love you, not see you, and no longer look on you as the disposer of my destiny, but I cannot live without you. That is a burden that is beyond my power to support, and the mere thought of it makes me look upon death with less affright. Dear, have some pity on your poor Laura. Save her from herself. Spare her a crime and spare yourself eternal remorse. For you will feel it: you have a good heart and you will never be able to wipe from it the memory of having caused the death of an innocent being who loves you passionately.

"What a night I must go through! This is the self-control that you wished me to learn. My head is on fire, my mind is in a whirl, and I – I can hardly see to write to you. Oh, for pity's sake! I think that I shall die.

"You must send me a line to reassure me before you come and see me. I have only two ideas now – to love you and be loved by you – or to die, if you have but the idea of deserting me.

"Oh! Maurice, you cannot think of it: those children that you were playing with this evening, – you cannot deprive them of their mother. Yet I swear my fate and my life are in your hands. May God forgive me, but I suffer too much to feel anything but my own sorrow. But whether I can return to my duties depends on Maurice.

"You must be cruel and pitiless to behave as you do. My life hangs but by a thread. Break it if you please. I have waited for you since this morning and I have not seen you. Every minute has increased my anxiety, and my impatience to see you has so upset me that at this moment only the pain I suffer convinces me that I am alive. Would you have me die? Very well, I shall expire from the despair of having known and loved you. But you will not be happy: your

remorse will avenge me. My blood will cry out against you. For you, you alone will have caused my death.

"*5 o'clock.*

"Unhappy man, be careful! You have ruined me for ever. Do not plunge me once again in that dreadful state from which I have so hardly escaped. Tremble at what I may do to myself, to you, to her, – to the whole world even, – if she takes me from you."

At last Laura could bear it no longer: she ordered her carriage and set out for Mortefontaine. It was a Friday.

What was it Laura did? Who were the witnesses of this 'disastrous affair' about which Laura wrote so often later on? We have been unable to find the slightest trace of it either in the Memoirs or the letters, or in the police records: yet the scandal was terrible and the Emperor, who heard about it subsequently, wished to settle the matter personally. But the secret was admirably kept.

"*2 o'clock in the morning.*

"I have just arrived in the most dreadful condition, in a state of collapse from fever, shivering, and nausea: I found my poor brother here in the last stage of anxiety, and his eloquent silence seemed, through his tears, to thank you for having saved his sister from despair.

"Maurice, you alone can make good the scandal that will be caused by this disastrous affair. Your love is my protection and my shield against everything that anyone can say. If you abandon me, I am lost, and I shall be lost for loving you too much.

"Good-bye: my strength is at an end. I will write to you to-morrow."

On the following day Laura wrote to Maurice.

"*Sunday. 4 o'clock in the evening.*

"Four o'clock and nothing from you yet. After having sacrificed everything for you, I am not uneasy, I cannot be; but a letter might have been intercepted. Maurice, I have sacrificed everything for you, I do not repent and I shall never do so. You are the master of my life; my peace of mind, – all that I have, is in your power. You can rob me of everything and I am lost in the eyes of the world, if, after yesterday's affair, your love does not vindicate me."

But an unexpected factor now appeared to upset the game. Napoleon deserted the remnants of the Grand Army in full retreat. 'I shall carry more weight on my throne in the Tuileries than at the head of the Army,' said the Emperor to the few persons who were with him at the time of his departure. Laura adds reluctantly: 'and he was quite right.'

'On December 19th at a quarter after midnight Napoleon arrived at the outer gate of the Tuileries. On the following day, almost before daylight, the boom of the cannon at the Invalides announced to Paris that the Emperor had come back. I was then too ill to go to the Palace. I sent my brother: I wanted news of Junot. Albert went, and told me on his return that the Emperor's levée had never been so splendid or so well attended. Napoleon himself was at his best.'

The arrival of the Emperor, who was thought to be fighting in the North, could not have been more inopportune.

Laura's 'disastrous affair' was certainly known at the Police Ministry. At the head of this Department was one of the most amusing figures in the Imperial world, generally so

dull. This was General Savary, Duc de Rovigo, who served his master in a diversity of capacities, creditable and otherwise. A dashing fellow, eaten up with conceit, an inveterate intriguer, more of the gay deceiver than the Police Minister, used by some, duped by others, and at last deceived by everybody and especially by Madame la Duchesse de Rovigo, née Fodoas. He was a combination of Jocrisse and Sganarelle.

One day, says a witness of the incident, when Napoleon was expressing himself rather strongly in public on the notorious misconduct of Madame de Savary, the husband, with his customary cringing assurance, replied, with a diffident smile:

'Sire, you are exposing my private affairs.'

'Listen to the fool, gentlemen!' said the Emperor contemptuously: 'he pretends I am exposing his private affairs: his private affairs, – as if he had any!'

Laura, for her part, alleges that she had heard him say that if Napoleon ordered him to kill his father he would do so without hesitation. It is true that Thiébault ascribes the same remark to Davoust. The newly made Dukes would at that time have been very ready to make such vicarious sacrifices.

Savary detested Junot. This hatred arose from jealousies of days gone by. Under the Consulate the relations of the two men had already been embittered by professional rivalry. Junot, as Governor of Paris, controlled one section of the First Consul's Police: Savary, however, was in charge of his personal security. It was common knowledge that the rival police authorities were continually bombarding each other with dossiers and reports.

The Duc d'Enghien's execution provided the necessary

JOACHIM MURAT

From an engraving after the portrait by Gérard

corpse for the definite establishment of Savary's career. But the future Duc de Rovigo had a far more redoubtable enemy than Junot, namely Fouché, whom Savary was very hopeful of replacing in time to come.

After Jéna, while the Emperor was fighting in the heart of Germany, Paris was practically in the sole charge of two men – Fouché and Junot. The latter was Military Governor and the former Police Minister. Both were on intimate terms with Caroline Murat, the Emperor's sister. Junot was then her lover, as has been seen; as for Fouché, Savary alleges in his Memoirs that he, Fouché, 'could not get on without someone whom discretion forbids me to mention.' By means of this double intrigue Caroline insured herself against her brother's death. If the Emperor did not come back, Murat, through his wife, had a considerable advantage over other possible candidates to the throne. But the Emperor came back and no one dared tell him of this . . . sale of the bear's skin. Caroline's party remained so influential that no one ventured to attack it. Savary, however, was prepared to stake everything and had the courage to grasp the nettle. He made a report to the Emperor. It was a masterstroke, and subsequently brought him a dukedom.

Laura pretends that Junot saw this famous report in Napoleon's hands. The Emperor could not hide the document quickly enough and Junot had the eye of the champion pistol-shot. Napoleon forbade him to challenge Savary, and Junot had to pay everybody's score and leave for Portugal. This gave rise to an inexpiable feud between the two men.

On the other hand, Savary's feelings towards Laura are much more difficult to disentangle. Junot's departure was not a very serious blow to his wife. Laura was forced, in her

Memoirs, to say that she was on the worst possible terms with Rovigo: but she exaggerated. Savary was a constant visitor at her house, he even had the entrée to her room by a secret passage at all hours. This is hardly a condition of open hostility.

In spite of all this Laura knew by experience how readily Savary would betray her if it was in any way to his advantage to do so. Still, there was one hope left. When the Emperor's return was announced, Rovigo, the 'police-man-of-all-work,' had taken off his jack-boots and put on his Court shoes. His position was not a particularly agreeable one.

At the time of the Mallet affair which, for the space of one morning, nearly brought down the Empire, Savary, the Police Minister, allowed himself to be removed to the 'Force' prison and entered in the gaoler's register, with every outward sign of respect, it is true. This 'tour de Force,' as it was called, had dissolved Paris in a burst of laughter, and Heaven alone knew how the Emperor would take the matter. It is in Savary's Memoirs that we read of the renewal of relations between Savary and Napoleon, on the day following the latter's return from Russia.

'Not one among all the Ministers present would have been willing to take my place: they seemed as though they dared not speak to me: the crowd parted as if to let a funeral procession go through. . . . The Emperor asked me a quantity of questions about the state of the country before he touched on the Mallet affair. . . . He was much pleased and especially because I spoke no ill of anybody. People in France never understood how delighted the Emperor was when he received no complaints.'

Still, it was simply a question of a favourable opportunity: since Savary remains in office he will speak sometime and Laura already heard the rumble of the storm. She was weary and would sooner finish the affair. Since a scandal is inevitable she had better disappear.

Laura tells Maurice what she intends to do.

"There is nothing for me but death. That is your wish is it not? But why sentence me to death so cruelly? Since yesterday I have been in the most dreadful agony. My life would have been ended long ago if I had not been deprived of the means of ending it. But it is hardly possible to stop a poor wretch who is in such despair as mine. Before to-day is finished you shall be satisfied. I shall have ceased to exist, but do not force me to curse you with my last sigh: come and see me for just one moment, and in dying, my last thought shall be of forgiveness since once more and only once I can let my eyes rest upon yours.

"Reflect that Hell does not contain a torment like that I suffer when I wait for you. Maurice, this is the cry of death: you must not refuse."

It was on December 23rd that Laura tried to commit suicide. We learn the exact date from a letter she wrote three years after these events, when she was again *enceinte*.

"You know how my despair turned my head three years ago. The 23rd December will be the fatal anniversary of the day on which I swallowed the opium that was to end my life. Would you have me suffer once again? I am in your hands. My love for you is a thousand times stronger than it was then.

"Léon[1] is quite well again, and so is Alfred. Their *little brother or little sister* is also very well. Good-bye."

We must now refer to Laura's private diary for a description of the various phases of death as it advanced upon her. Indeed it is something like a medico-sentimental record.

"O God, give me the necessary strength and courage not to succumb to the dreadful temptation that fills my heart. Spare me a crime; bring me back to those sacred duties that I should never have betrayed. Alas! my children will curse my memory! When their tender years are threatened by some danger, their first cry will not be a regret for her upon whom God had laid the obligation of protecting them against every peril, but they will cry out reproachfully: 'Mother, mother, why did you leave us?'

"Forgive me, my children, forgive me for leaving you, but my life is unbearable. I can no longer bear the burden of my sufferings. Your unhappy mother is dying from the blows of an inhuman assassin. Doubtless she is guilty: but remember her affection for you, her constant solicitude for each one of you. You, my Josephine, my firstborn, my pride and my love, remember how I worshipped you, and think how much I must have suffered since such compensations could not allay my dreadful wounds. He who drives me to this extremity – his is the guilt, – unhappy wretch: but do not speak ill of him. His remorse will avenge me.

"I cannot live without him, so I must die. I have made up my mind, and nothing shall stay my hand. I have managed to secure a dose of opium that will be enough to

[1] Under the Restoration, Napoleon d'Abrantès, whose Christian name was somewhat too striking, was called Léon (instead of Napo, as he used to be).

snap the thread of my life in less than an hour. Once more, my children, forgive me. But no, you will never forgive my crime. It is indeed an awful one – to depart from life like this, but my hand is moved by another more guilty than my own: that other hand could stop me, but far from doing so, it hands me the cup that is to deliver me from life.

"Thank you, Maurice, you are right: since I may not be yours I belong to the tomb. Good-bye.

"Yes, good-bye for ever. You have just pronounced my sentence. You think me calmer – I have just abandoned myself to death. Death is within me: in an hour perhaps, I shall be no more, and you will live to be wretched for ever.

"Farewell. You must at least console my unhappy friends and my children. They will not know that you are my murderer, and perhaps they will bless you though really you deserve their curses."

We know to-day that poisoning by laudanum taken through the mouth is in practice very difficult. The stomach reacts violently against a dose that must necessarily be considerable, evacuates its contents, and the suicide fails.

Laura evidently did not know that the larger the dose the less effective it would be. Although she experienced all the anguish of a genuine death, she survived her attempt. It is now in the past tense that she writes in her diary.

"It is but too true, I tried to take my life. Distraught by misery, I was wicked enough to dispose of a life that was not mine. When I reached God's tribunal, what could I have replied when He asked me why I was thus deserting in this way my children, my friends and an entire family that worshipped me? I should have had to admit, blushing for shame, that a criminal and unhappy passion had so prevailed

upon my reason as to make me forget everything and drive me out of life. Oh! Maurice, yet it is too true that this fatal love is the sole cause of my crime and that at this very moment, though I detest my fault, I feel that to-morrow I should again be equally guilty if you did but murmur that we must 'part.'

"I have said it a thousand times and I repeat once more, never had I loved, never had I known the despair, the wild happiness that love can bring. Tears and lamentations can give some idea of sorrow: but what can ever express those joys of the heart, that delicious ecstasy, that oblivion of the whole world, that destruction of all one's being in which the heart alone survives and cannot support the torrent of joy that overwhelms it? Well, Maurice, these ineffable delights, these intoxicating transports, – they are mine, when I look into your dear eyes, so noble, so pure, and so kind, and when your arms draw me into your embrace, and when, pressed against you, I feel your heart beat against my own, – then I realize that my love is all my life! That no human reasoning can prevail against its continuance, and that in abandoning myself to my inexorable fate, I feel – I say it once more – that for me it is either Maurice or Death."

Chapter VII

This abortive suicide had a deep effect on Laura and almost equally on the history of the Empire, for it throws a light on a whole series of measures taken by the Emperor which, up till now, had been hard to understand. These were the logical consequences of the scandal. Napoleon decided that Laura must go into exile and in order to kill two birds with one stone he appointed Junot, who had become a nuisance, Governor of Illyria.

To get a clear idea of Napoleon's attitude to the Mortefontaine scandal, it was essential to go carefully through the Memoirs. On his return from Russia the Emperor gave Laura an audience, and it was then that he expressed his intention of banishing her. Laura, in the Memoirs, cannot and will not admit that this sentence was ever passed upon her, but one cannot but feel that the recollection of it haunts her: she speaks of the matter again on two occasions and leaves it only to return to it again three volumes later: and she refers to it thenceforward again and again in the course of her interminable narrative. The description of the interview contains a great deal of diverse material: a certain amount of gossip, some obscure allusions, interspersed with some very valuable information. One must admit that it was a convenient opportunity for Laura to display her own importance and, while she had the Emperor under her pen, to recall certain old services that seemed to have been unduly forgotten. She had a large and friendly audience. The Memoirs were addressed to the public in general: nevertheless as a matter of fact, many of those affected by this interview were still living in 1832. Enemies like Savary, friends like Cherval, who was then ninety years old, the

divine Juliette, the rather faded Queen of the Abbaye-aux-Bois, Maurice himself, who, it was said, 'had not altered by a single line.' Their evidence, and perhaps some imprudent confidences of days gone by, which would have much enlivened the Memoirs, made it essential for the author to tell as little of the truth as she could. We are about to try and release that little flame from the impenetrable darkness in which Laura has imprisoned it. We shall follow her step by step before and during that audience, which was the turning point of her fate.

'When I heard of the Emperor's arrival at the Tuileries,' says Laura in her Memoirs, 'I gave a cry of delight [!!!] Doubtless the army commanders would soon be there. I had sent my brother to the Palace on the following day but the crowd was so great that he could not see the Emperor: so I waited a few days.'

However, December 23rd, the day of the suicide, had gone by and nothing happened. Laura made a move: she had a convenient pretext in a letter from Junot.

'ELBING, ON THE VISTULA.
'*Dec.* 22*nd*, 1812.

'Ask for an audience from the Emperor, entreat him to see you, he cannot refuse. I cannot be continually begging: and I cannot sit a horse. . . . It is terribly cold.

'All my love.

'"J."'

Junot adds with some pride: 'When one has gone through this campaign without complaining, I defy fate to find any means of making me alter my feelings.'

'I wrote to the Emperor,' Laura continues, 'that I was not able to go to the Palace. I was dangerously ill with a terrible affection of the nerves and I could not move from one room to another except on a litter carried by two servants. The troubles with which I had been tormented for a year had at last dealt me something like a mortal blow. I was suffering from an inflammation of the stomach and was very ill indeed.'

In point of fact Laura was just at the beginning of a very painful pregnancy that could not be made public until two months later.

'In writing to the Emperor I expressed myself with much concern about Junot. I felt so ill and Junot's letters were so depressed that the tears came into my eyes as I read them.

'On the very day after I had written to the Emperor, my dear Duroc, my brother and my friend, arrived.'

'Our relations had always been those of brother and sister,' Laura writes. This is really more than doubtful. Even the Emperor did not know what to make of the connection and had charged Savary to enquire into the extent of this fraternal devotion. The Grand Marshal was in possession of a great many State secrets and in his master's mind the image of Laura was always associated with the shade of Metternich.

The Emperor was afraid she might join the enemy.

Duroc had very prominent eyes and there was something flabby and undecided about the whole appearance of the man that made Laura write:

'He was not handsome, yet the regard I had for him ought to lend distinction to the shade I call to mind to-day.'

' "Duroc," I said to him, taking his hand, "I am very ill,

perhaps I shall not again see the leaves upon those trees." And I pointed out the trees in my garden. "What is there between the Emperor and Junot?"

' "Nothing new," he answered.

' "He thought I knew of the two reports,[1] but they had not been shown to me, so as to spare me any addition to my already considerable troubles." ' Laura continues: ' "What is the report of the 23rd? And what month?" I questioned Duroc closely: he answered incoherently and left me more uneasy than I can say.'

Here we can catch Laura red-handed. For she had either deceived Duroc, that is to say the Emperor, or she had tried to dupe her readers. At the end of one of her letters to Junot that were seized by the Cossacks and reached us a hundred years later, Laura had added the following post-script, more than three months before.

'AIX (SAVOY), *Sept. 7th*, 1812.

'I reopen my letter to tell you that I am not going back to Geneva. Yesterday, after I had written my letter, I received the report of the 23rd. You have of course read it and you know me well enough to be sure that that is not the moment I should choose for a party of pleasure.'

Why does Laura, who unquestionably had known of the existence of these reports for three months and a half, why in her Memoirs does she deny this against all the evidence? The fact is that the visitors to the Abrantès' house, for whose benefit Laura had found it more convenient to be ignorant

[1] Especially the fourteenth, dated from Smolensk, Aug. 23rd, 1812, in which Junot's inexplicable conduct is severely censured by the Emperor.

of the reports in 1812, were almost all, as we have seen, still alive in 1832. She was hardly anxious to convict herself of the deception.

She continues in her Memoirs:

'As I could never leave my bed until six or seven o'clock in the evening, my request for an audience had to go through Duroc, so that he might explain to the Emperor the condition I was in. The Emperor at once sent a message to the effect that he would receive me at nine o'clock on the following day.

'I accordingly went to the Palace at half-past eight and was kept waiting more than an hour.'

We may picture Laura in the antechamber at the Tuileries surrounded by members of the Household who came to chat with her: she knew them all and felt very much at home.

Napoleon had just come back from Russia. The remnants of the Grand Army, under Murat's command, were fading away from day to day. Yet the Emperor put everything aside, and wasted an hour and a half listening to a woman's stories. To anyone who is familiar with his careful disposal of his time, this is surprising. And yet the reasons for which he granted this audience were sufficiently cogent. In the first place, the affair threatened scandal. The Emperor would not have scandal under any pretext, and least of all at Mortefontaine.

Mortefontaine was under close surveillance because of the presence of Désirée, Princess of Sweden, wife of Bernadotte who had just thrown off the mask. Napoleon also hoped to get from the interview some information about Metternich and the Murats, who were beginning to waver,

and to discover Laura's attitude and intimacies. Last of all, the lives of the women about his Court had always deeply interested the Emperor. The purveyance of this type of news was one of the reasons for the favour which Savary enjoyed so long, according to Henry Houssaye. Furthermore Major Bonaparte had an inveterate weakness for Sergeant Junot, he wanted to find out and perhaps to soften the effect that the famous reports may have produced on his turbid intellect.

The documents from which we propose to reconstruct this interview about which so little is known, come from three sources. To the Memoirs, which are our guide for the sequence of events, must be added a few remarks that fell from the Emperor and were eagerly collected by Las Cases at St. Helena: and the key to the riddle is given us by a short note from Laura addressed to Maurice immediately after the interview. That is an irrefutable document which will be dealt with in its place.

'As soon as the Emperor saw me, his ejaculation of surprise showed how greatly he was touched and moved by the change in my appearance.

' "Good heavens, Madame Junot, what can have been the matter? You must have been very ill. This is clearly genuine and not a *variety of the vapours!*"

'I smiled sadly. At that period in my life I was convinced I was going to die.

' "Well, well," said he, "I was told that you were shamming illness."

'I raised my eyes to his so that he could see that their brilliance was the result of fever. Indeed at that time in the evening it always became more acute. And I held up my hands and my gaunt emaciated fingers on which no ring

would stay.' One may be excused for speculating whether Laura mentioned the recent loss of her wedding-ring.

'The Emperor continued to observe me closely. We were both standing. For an instant I felt so weak that I leaned against the table and smelt some salts. Napoleon noticed this and, taking my hand, almost pushed me into an arm-chair. He was playing with a glove that lay upon his desk: a very small one. I suppose belonging to Marie Louise.

'The Emperor asked,' says Laura, 'whether Junot had complained of him in his letters.

' "Why did you not bring me Junot's letters? I am sure that he is complaining of me like the rest of them."

'He got up and threw the glove so violently against the window that the glass actually shook. He continued, with growing anger:

' "He is grumbling like the rest of them. They are an ungrateful crew."

'At that moment he looked at me and suddenly started back in something like alarm. And indeed I was not surprised. I felt at the point of death. I could only shut my eyes and hold back my tears. If I had said a word, if I had looked at the Emperor, I should have collapsed, and I knew how much he disliked such scenes. Yet God is my witness that at the moment the fear of displeasing him was my very last concern.'

Laura, in her turn, burst into the most violent reproaches, and cried out: 'You strike without pity at anyone that is near you.'

And, no doubt to find a precedent for such lèse Majestê, Laura adds, still at the top of her voice: 'Marshal Lannes treated you as he would not have treated an inferior.'

'I fell back upon my chair, exhausted. I don't know how

I came to behave so boldly, but at that moment I would have said even more plainly what I thought.'

Laura takes a modest pleasure in her achievement, no doubt due, as she explains, to Napoleon's surprise.

The Emperor bit his lips and seemed visibly embarrassed.

'You are amazingly like your mother when you are angry,' he said with a half-smile. 'You are as violent as she is.' But Laura unwisely pushed her advantage further by reminding the Emperor what he owed to the Permon family.

'It is a long while, Sire, since I told your Majesty that I would not hear a word about my mother that was not spoken with proper respect.'

This was going too far. The Emperor was about to turn her out of the room.

' "Very well," said he with a very strange look, standing aside as if to let me pass; "no one is keeping you here." '

But Laura, having secured a hold, was not going to let go, at least she gives us to understand as much: she describes the interview as recommencing, and then suddenly turning to her own advantage, to that of Junot, and of her excellent brother Albert, whom she wishes to get re-appointed to the Police Service, whence Rovigo's hatred of all the Junot clan had got him removed.

'The Emperor, as though he was anxious to make me pay for the little triumph that I had just achieved, suddenly asked me, in sharp tones, why I always allied myself with his enemies.'

They were, in fact, all frequenters of the Abrantès' house, Laura says in another part of her Memoirs, but the reference was more especially to Cherval.

Then they went on to say a good deal about Mesdames

de Récamier and de Chevreuse, both exiled to a distance of two hundred miles from Paris. Laura pointed out to the Emperor the sad position of the divine Juliette exiled at Lyons.

'Sire, your Majesty would do a very gracious act in recalling Madame Récamier. Bring her back to her own country, her home: for home is the place of one's affections and one's habits, etc. . . .'

Then they said a few words about the unhappy love affair of Junot and Caroline, the Emperor's sister.

' "I was pleased with you, over that business," he said with a gravity of look and speech that I cannot reproduce here.

' "I cannot say the same about another (the Emperor meant his sister Caroline), but I suppose that those nearest to us do not always treat us best. Good-bye."

'And he returned to his desk where he sat down: and before I had shut the outer door he was probably plunged in those lofty thoughts of his that swayed the fortunes of the world.'

'I found a number of friends in the antechambers all of whom wanted to give me an arm down the stairs of the "Pavillon de Flore." The Comte de Courtomer, who was on duty at the time, tried to discover from my pale face whether I had succeeded. I nodded in the affirmative. At the same moment Duroc came in with M. de Brigode. Two more friends. All of them wanted to act as my escort. I remembered the fireworks at Aix when I saw all those uniformed and decorated masqueraders – for it was a masquerade – escorting a poor young woman, who looked like Death taking a walk.' 'Who looked like Death taking a walk.' It was indeed true that there was death in Laura's heart. Here is the letter she wrote to Maurice.

"I told you that this fatal love would be my ruin. I have to go into exile, I have to leave my home, my friends, everything that is dear to me, and go, dying as I am, into a foreign land. If I refuse, my husband will be informed of that dreadful scene and its fatal causes. *He who is all-powerful and must be obeyed* has made this the price of his silence; that is what I have been told to-day and I will sacrifice myself for your safety and your peace of mind. I shall go. I shall leave my own dear country and look for death, though indeed I shall carry death with me in my heart. When I leave you the mortal blow will have fallen. Maurice, I repeat here and now that I have never loved as I love you. To be away from you is death for me. I shall never survive so cruel an ordeal."

This letter contains the admission that it was unquestionably in the course of that audience in 1812 that the Emperor announced to Laura her sentence of exile, an exile that she was to succeed in getting deferred and which did not take effect until after her husband's death.

Laura never admitted this and she devoted a number of pages to confusing the dates. If one is to believe her version she was the victim of a police conspiracy, and the inexplicable order that she was to live more than fifty leagues outside Paris was only made known to her, to her infinite amazement, on the day following Junot's tragic death.

One historical point which has hitherto been very obscure is thus cleared up.

But there is another. In her private Diary, entrusted by her to Balzac and found among that author's papers and doubtless intended to be published – part of which indeed was given to the public by M. Turquan, – Laura puts her

famous outburst against the Emperor in the year 1809. She had several good reasons for preferring the earlier date. In the eyes of Balzac in the first place, and, in the event of publication, in the eyes of her readers, and, above all, in those of Metternich, who was still all-powerful, it would look much better if she had rated the Emperor over the Austrian Chancellor. Such an incident carried a good deal more weight, and it might well be that the far-away Metternich would be flattered to learn that his mistress had upon occasion shown herself so decided an ally.

In point of fact, six years later at Saint Helena, the Emperor, when relating to Las Cases his imbroglios with Laura, doubtless combined into the one occasion the different audiences that he had given her since her return from Portugal up to the end of 1812: he adds in conclusion, 'Then she lost her temper and *treated me like a schoolboy*. There was nothing to be done but to pack her off[1] and leave her to herself.' These are very much the terms which Laura uses in writing to Maurice. It was the Emperor himself who sent her for a 'walk.'

This contemptuously ironical expression makes it possible to establish the true date. It was in 1812 that the Emperor announced to Laura his intention of sending her into exile.

That was at the bottom of the apparently unexplained fainting fits during the audience, of that sharp reproach: 'You strike pitilessly at those who are near you': that evocation of Lannes' bloodstained shade, and the bitter truths flung out amid the putrid odour of the gangrene rising from his mattress.

With the help of the Recollections and the Memoirs we

[1] Envoyer promener.

can reconstruct the scene. A fire was crackling in the black marble chimney-piece, for the month was December. The Emperor is chilly and the room is dark for he hates a bright light. All that can be seen of Laura is the black mass of her hair, her pointed nose and her slim form shaken with sobs: he walks up and down with his hands behind his back.

'Another scandal – and at Mortefontaine; – that is beyond everything: perhaps worse than the Metternich affair. And for whom! for this green youth! She, at her age, with her four children! The Permon family are all adventuresses, from her mother, the Palormia woman, with her furnished houses and her regal airs, to that brother of hers, that peculating prison-warder, whose sole talents lay in the manipulation of the profits of the Marseilles gaming-tables. He got more than 240,000 francs in one year and had to be dismissed like a footman after the Montrond affair.'[1]

'As for her, the cup is full this time, she will have to go, like the Chevreuse and the Récamier and all the other cackling women. Where? To the Devil if she likes, and under whatever pretext she may invent – it does not matter what. Otherwise? – otherwise Junot, yes, Junot, her stupid husband, that blustering pursuer of women, shall be told everything: and this time he, the Emperor, will let him take his own way. Let her remember the Metternich affair and the pair of scissors with which her husband stabbed her six times under one of her breasts. Junot is an excitable fellow and he will make the gossips laugh on the other side of their faces.'

She hardly hears what he is saying, and merely under-

[1] Some of this, as the Emperor was aware, reached Junot. The duc d'Abrantès, always short of money, drew bills on his brother, which 'the worthy Albert' did not dare refuse to endorse.

stands that she is being tortured, that she is to be torn from her house, that she is being brutally treated for a mere peccadillo, that 'He who is all-powerful and must be obeyed' is standing there shouting at her, the same shabby youth, the 'puss in boots' whom she had so often laughed at in the family circle. At last, at the end of her endurance, she 'breaks out,' as she says. Hence her cutting reminder of all he owes, he, the Emperor, to the race of the Comneni, and especially to her mother at whose house he and all his friends used to come and fill their stomachs, in Paris and at Montpellier, where his father Charles Bonaparte had gone to die. Adventurers indeed! The Comneni, descended from the Eastern Emperors!

Six years later the Emperor had not recovered from his stupefaction. When he thought over Laura's exit, he could not resist, no doubt from association of ideas, relating the fantastic story of his neighbours the Stephanopoli, who were raised from the status of farmers in Corsica to that of Princes in Paris, and baptized Comneni by the grace of Vergennes, then Minister of Louis XVI, who had married one of their cousins and wanted his wife to come of distinguished family. The Emperor condescended to details and specifically stated that 'they owed much kindness, and a good deal more than kindness to my mother.'

The first of January 1813 fell on a Friday. Laura went to Malmaison that day to offer her duty to the superstitious Joséphine. The figure 13, the day of the week, the cold weather that the little court had experienced at Navarre where the Empress passed the autumn, made these formal courtesies seem more dismal and wearisome than ever. There was a good deal of whispered comment on the news.

On January 6th, St. Joseph's day, Laura gave her last children's dance.

Arrivals from the country became more frequent and each one brought news: mourning became more and more common. A sense of vague disquiet began to be felt. Maurice and Laura themselves began to make certain arrangements.

"It is six o'clock and I have not yet been able to sleep. I am nervous, I feel ill, I have a fever, but my heart is what chiefly troubles me: and that will be the most difficult to cure, because the pain is so acute and alas! there is no doctor that can treat it. Maurice, I can do everything except give up seeing you. Yet I am writing, for the sake of your convenience and peace of mind, to agree to what I understand to be your wishes. You must not visit me often: you can explain the more frequent visits that you have paid me during the past month. That will be quite easy. The Duke's return will be a perfectly plausible pretext because a cessation of your visits, at that very time, would have given colour to the rumours about us. That is what you must say, and you will be forgiven, especially when people see that you are not keeping them up. It is a great sacrifice, Maurice, for nothing is so delightful as a daily association with the object of one's love. The most ordinary acts and plans become interesting when the loved one is there. One is happier than ever when at last we are alone together. We enjoy our happiness the more because it has been purchased with a few hours of constraint that are not without a charm of their own, because the recollection of yesterday's felicity is too vivid and too delicious not to drive out every other thought, even to the neglect of people actually present.

"But, Maurice, since it must be, and your interest requires it, I shall bring myself to renounce a pleasure so keen and so necessary to a relation which is a true bond between us, and not an intrigue. But when I make this sacrifice for you, Maurice, your heart must make it good. Be mine alone, and let me see you as often as I may: let your love and care make me forget that there are those who wish to separate us. Separate us! Ah! that is no longer possible: the bonds between our hearts are such that only death can break. I have been the object of such powerful and all-absorbing passions that I could have demanded the life of the man who loved me. Perhaps you love me equally well but your heart is fearful and does not dare to reveal itself to me, when I would give my life to know whether it is wholly mine even as mine is wholly yours. I shall forget everything except you and my love. Good-bye: tell me that you love me.'

Young Boni de Castellane, future Marshal of France, was then twenty-four years old. He was A.D.C. to Narbonne, Junot's friend. While he was in the depths of Russia he thought a great deal about Laura, his magnificent neighbour. The Castellane family lived in the Rue de l'Arcade, quite near the Rue des Champs Elysées. On October 14th he wrote to his father the following very soldierly letter from Moscow, which was intercepted by the Cossacks, like those of the Duc d'Abrantès: 'Please give my respectful regards to Madame d'Abrantès and to Lallemand. I meant to write to them but I have no time: I must wax my boots. Good-night, my dear father.'

In January 1813 he came back from Russia, hardly able to walk. The retreat had not altered either his good humour

or his faith in his master's star. No sooner back in Paris than he wanted to come into the story, and hear all that might be going forward, – although his ears were frost-bitten. On January 28th he writes in his note-book:

'Madame d'Abrantès had been working for a long time at a beautiful purse[1] embroidered with fine pearls and she would not say for whom it was intended. M. de Balincourt, who is her lover, which I did not know, displayed it in a company which the Duchess did not frequent. The purse was so handsome that it excited comment. I managed to tell Madame d'Abrantès that I had found out the possessor of her purse and I fancy she will not easily forgive me.'

Young Boni was well-informed. The short passage contains some valuable information: 'a company which the Duchess did not frequent': clearly Maurice's own friends, among whom his love affairs began to be talked about, as much at the Court as at St. Germain.

When sending Maurice this 'handsome' purse, Laura had accompanied it with the following letter:

"I wrote to you this morning and I am writing to you again this evening, sending little Joséphine's purse. The dear little soul wanted to write a letter as well, but I would not let her; you will easily understand why. Keep the purse carefully, Maurice, and do not forget what my little Napoleon said: You see, my dear, how everything that is mine feels for you and loves you: and why is this: *Because they know that you are their mother's happiness* (*!!*) Ah! Maurice, compare this house with another that sometimes

[1] Laura had no doubt said that the purse was the work of her daughter Joséphine, the Emperor's god-daughter.

attracts you and dedicate that good noble heart of yours to me and mine. Good-bye. I love you and kiss you a thousand times. Good-bye, my dear.

"I saw Charles this morning and had the oddest conversation with him. I will tell you all about it in my next letter. Good-bye, my dear."

The Charles in question was the celebrated M. Charles, ex-admirer of Joséphine and at the moment the inseparable friend of the Junots. Laura gives us in her Memoirs an extremely subtle and detailed portrait of this celebrated personage. 'M. Charles was almost of historic importance: he was always associated with some great name and it was marvellous to watch how unknown reputations would catch a reflection from this beacon of splendour and themselves become luminaries of Society.' Charles had often done the Duc d'Abrantès a service. Joséphine's regard had put them in a position to live in good style and help their friends. 'He did not,' says Laura, 'belong to the smart world, but he had fine clothes and wore them well: like all his compatriots from Dauphiné he was very careful. His conversation was full of puns and buffoonery, in short he was what is called an odd fellow: he made one laugh.'

The Emperor had written to Prince Eugène on January 28th, 1813.

'You can send back the Duc d'Abrantès: that will relieve the army of at least one embarrassment. Besides he will never be the slightest use to us again.'

At the beginning of February Junot was expected home at any day.

"I am sending you a letter which I have just received. Read it carefully and you will see that we must not meet

to-morrow, but we can to-day, no matter what time you come back from Malmaison, even in the middle of the night.

"To-morrow there will already be danger, but to-night there will be none, and we must take advantage of the opportunity to bid each other a long farewell, perhaps for ever.

"Maurice, I am in despair, and I have not even the consolation of confessing all my distress, because after all he is my friend, the father of my children, and it is very wrong of me to weep like this.

' Come at once. He speaks of the 6th, but we cannot be sure. His letter has just arrived, and I have a presentiment that he will come to-morrow evening or in the night.

"Good-bye, Maurice, come and comfort me and say good-bye to your poor Laura."

Finally, young Castellane, who seems very much interested in the Junots, writes in his Diary:

February 3rd. 'The Duc d'Abrantès has arrived. He is crippled with rheumatism, and if that could improve his character and mend his manners, it would be a case of evil bringing forth good. His campaign was hardly brilliant. At bottom I believe him a good fellow.'

So Junot came back, but it was a different Junot. 'I found him not merely changed,' says Laura, 'but morally destroyed.' Victor Dupuy, in his military recollections, gives us this striking portrait:

'Eight or nine years previously, at the Camp at Boulogne I had seen the splendid Junot, whose handsome face and

THE EMPEROR NAPOLEON I AND HIS MARSHALS

From a photograph of a contemporary medallion

magnificent bearing surpassed all the officers in the army. What a change was here! Instead of the Emperor's Aide de Camp, admired by everyone, I saw a great lumbering creature, with stooping shoulders and a brutal and repulsive expression, carelessly dressed in an ill-fitting coat, and giving not a hint of what he had been a few years before.'

Contemporaries attribute Junot's madness to various causes: to his wounds, which had been mostly in the head: to the cold during the Russian campaign: to his disgrace by the Emperor. Napoleon is the only one to give an exact diagnosis of his condition. 'His trouble,' said he, 'began in his own excesses.' That is a striking contribution to Cabanès' learned study on Napoleon and medicine.

Head-wounds have never produced symptoms like those of Junot. In the modern phraseology of medicine Junot's condition is easily recognizable as general paralysis. He was already somewhat predisposed to this by heredity. His father, his brother and his sister were neurasthenic. And no doubt the wounds on his head had helped to localize the infection. But that there was infection there can be no doubt.

The first symptoms of the trouble are admirably described by Thiébaut, his Chief of Staff, who had kept him under careful observation since 1808.

Junot was, in fact, an excellent example of general paralysis. The victim, growing more and more incoherent, continued to carry on the ordinary transactions of life, but with lapses here and there. Hence his absurd orders, his melancholy, his ideas of suicide, and finally his rapid physical decline. He dragged himself painfully along, bent double over a stick. This Colonel of Hussars could no

longer sit a horse at forty years of age. His spinal marrow was already affected.

'Junot,' writes Laura, 'was in an extraordinary condition; he would often be half asleep for a whole day and then unable to sleep at night. He who was once so strong and self-controlled cried like a child.'

Chapter VIII

LAURA draws a touching picture of Junot's return home. 'Albert was between us. Our children were on my bed. Napoleon, lovely as a cherub, Alfred now in blooming health and a credit to his mother, though he had been such a poor little weakling when his father had left, and his daughters, one of whom was already angelically beautiful and showed promise of what she has since become, and our good Caroline, a friend who was at that time part of the family, – they were all round him, hugging him and kissing his hands, climbing on his shoulders, and overwhelming him with joy and happiness.'

The reality is always a little different. Laura was inwardly raging . . . at that moment Madame de Flotte was at Mortefontaine with Maurice, who had been officially appointed Chamberlain to Queen Julie.

"For twenty-four hours I have not had one moment's peace. At last I am alone and I must think of you, for I believe your image is more deeply graven on my heart than it has ever been and that since yesterday evening there is not one second when it has not been foremost in my thoughts, and when I have not, from the bottom of my soul, renewed my oath to love you for ever and be faithful to you. But now at last I can say so freely. I can utter your name and abandon myself to my love without fear of interruption by a word or a caress that are hateful, because they do not come from you.

"I can bear everything if I know that I am loved and especially if I am certain that you are faithful to me, that after the short space of time which imposes on us such

cruel deprivations I shall find my dear one the same constant lover as before.

"Think, Maurice, what service I have asked of you with regard to this woman. If you love me, it can hardly be a sacrifice. Tell me that you will do as I ask.

"Good-bye, Maurice, good-bye, my dear one. How I do love you, my only friend, my only love! How sad and unhappy my life is become! How long the days are when one cannot see the loved one. But if I am sure that you share my misery, then I suffer less.

"Good-bye. I am going to sleep in my little green bed. I shall think of you and try and sleep quietly, with the hope of getting some news of you and some further assurance of your love and constancy.

"He is very kind to me, and suspects nothing. You must not come until I let you know.

"1 *a.m.*

"This evening I had an attack that lasted several hours. I lay unconscious for some time in the Duke's arms: he was distracted to see me in such a state, and has only just left me to go to bed. His distress upsets me dreadfully, because I do not deserve it. I make him suffer and I suffer myself for another who perhaps does not deserve it either.

"But tell me, just tell me that you love me, and I shall be happy: you need not be anxious about your letter. Good-bye, love of my life.

"Maurice, swear to me that you have obeyed me as regards *that woman*, or that you have nothing on your conscience. Answer me this, or I shall send the bearer back to you at once."

Laura at last made up her mind to introduce Maurice to

the Duke. Junot's dream, as Napoleon observed, was to mix with none but 'noblemen with ten quarterings.' That was quite enough to make him take to Maurice.

"Good-bye: come early this evening. He is dining in town, and I want you to spend the entire evening with me. I may as well tell you that he liked you very much and that of all the new faces he has seen, he took to yours the most."

Laura explains in her Memoirs that at this period in her life she was suffering severely from a contraction of the abdomen which prevented her taking nourishment. Her weakness became so extreme that she had to take baths of meat juice in a wooden tub. Once she just escaped death from heart failure through the presence of mind of the excellent Calo who dragged her out of her bath. As a matter of fact she always suffered severely when pregnant; and she could not admit her present condition owing to Junot's absence. But as the months went by she had to take the bull by the horns.

'One day,' Laura writes, 'I told him I was *enceinte*.' Junot was at first delighted, and then suddenly became uneasy: in his disordered brain his devotion to Napoleon was his fixed idea, and he made his wife promise to bring up the child in fear of the Emperor, the fear of displeasing him, he added.

After the purse, Laura sent to Maurice 'a clock by Bréguet.'

"Maurice, I would have you look often at the hands on this clock-face. I want its movements to be a kind of symbol of my heart-beats, that poor heart of mine into which you and your love breathed life, but which will soon perhaps be cold and frozen by death; but in ceasing to exist

it will not cease to adore you and beyond the tomb it will preserve all the love that it has sworn to bear you.

"Maurice, when this clock strikes the hour of new loves, think, my dear, of the hour of midnight which was so long the hour at which we met and loved. I am quite sure that you will never forget it, for you may find more beauty, more charm to take your fancy, but you will never find a heart like mine. I think I am going to die: and yet you do love me, don't you, Maurice? Ah! I know you do!"

Much later Laura herself thinking of the hour of midnight was to write:

"When you were at M . . .,[1] I used to create a kind of illusion for myself. I used to say : If I liked, in two hours I could be by his side, and during the long lonely nights I thought I could hear the welcome click of the key in the little door and my heart beat furiously. Sometimes it was not you, but it might have been, and the possibility itself was a joy to me. Besides it was often realized. How often you braved the rain, wind and cold by night to devote a few hours to the happiness of being with one who loved you. Oh, Maurice, my dear one, the glory and hope of my existence, how could you reproach me sometimes with not appreciating what your love has made you do for me. Do you think that I should love you so much if I did not think I too was loved, in spite of all my reproaches and all my fears? Indeed no: love calls to love and may not live alone."

At all the entertainments were to be seen little groups of men, survivors from Russia, marked by their emaciation and their delight at beginning life once more.

[1] Mortefontaine.

Paris did not entirely realize the disaster and the winter was truly Parisian: a succession of balls and routs, at which all manner of jokes were made on faded laurels and frozen pomegranates![1] The Grand Army had disappeared, and the Master was raising another: he had to do so quickly and unobtrusively. Dancing was the order of the day. But the Princesses, his sisters, who had been the moving spirits of all such entertainments, were scattered to the four corners of the Empire. The new Empress was not to be thought of: Queen Hortense would perhaps do? A modern authority says: 'Throughout all these negotiations, anxieties, and preparations for war, which were pushed on with feverish haste, the life of the Court went on, but Queen Hortense was the only member of the Imperial Family who took part in it.' Twenty years later, recalling the delights of their youth, the Duchesse d'Abrantès wrote:

'She danced like a sylph and I can still see her, as slim as a nymph, dressed in the antique fashion with a short tunic, and a péplum of rose-coloured silk shot with silver, her lovely fair head crowned with roses. Her mother,' Laura adds, 'was the only person who did not seem to realize how charming her daughter was.'

Queen Hortense had for a long time lived apart from her husband, Louis Bonaparte, ex-king of Holland. King Louis was at the time busy with the treatment of his neurasthenia, and with his literary activities. He was trying his hand at a novel. She forced herself without a murmur to take part in the wearisome festivities of the Court, which the recent divorce made even more painful.

Here she is, on the 19th February 1813, sitting in the

[1] 'Grenadiers': the play on words cannot be rendered. (Translator.)

Imperial coach, by the side of Marie Louise. The new Empress is so awkward that everyone remembers Joséphine's graceful manner. The cavalcade makes its way from the Carrousel to the House of Assembly. It is freezing hard enough to split the paving-stones. The eight carriage windows are open. However, Queen Hortense 'endures,' her bare chest blue with the cold, her fair curls displaying a little triangular space of forehead, cut across by the edge of the tiara of diamond hortensias. Her eyes are violet, and her poor shivering shoulders are incomparably graceful. She laughs with closed lips like her mother Joséphine, for she has the Tascher teeth, so difficult to display gracefully. Her dress is of pink silk embroidered all over with silver hortensias, the skirt and the train trimmed with roses and pansies.

In accordance with orders, Hortense resumed her Mondays. It was a cripple's parade: some of the guests had wooden legs, and others both arms in a sling. Yet Julien and his blacks kept up a hellish bacchanalia – Julien the forbear of our own masters of 'jazz.' 'He was a negro,' says Laura, 'and I have never seen a more fantastic creature. When we made him play another "farandole" to finish the ball, after he had played all night, he went to sleep over his violin, and then went on again, and so on, nodding and recovering himself like a Chinese mandarin.'

The Emperor had ordered the Inca quadrille to be started again, in the rehearsals for which Laura had sprained her foot in days gone by. But alas! so many Peruvians lay under the snow that a reinforcement of eleven volunteers had to be asked for. It was probably in the course of one of these interminable performances that Queen Hortense noticed Maurice. The new Chamberlain would naturally

be on duty at all festivities. Maurice was cousin to General Flahaut, a friend of the Queen, and father of the small boy that Demorny, an elderly créole, had been willing to acknowledge as his own. Maurice and the Queen had another talent in common – painting.

'M. de Balincourt painted well enough,' says Laura, 'to make those to whom he presented his work really value it, but his chief distinction was a genuinely delicate perception. Queen Hortense had the very rare gift of getting an extraordinarily exact likeness. If, in the course of her subsequent adventures, she has not lost her drawings, I have seen in her albums portraits whose originals would be extremely surprised to find themselves side by side.'

The Queen invited Maurice to come and see her at the Hôtel Cerutti. They were delightful peaceful evenings with pleasant interludes of singing.

'How charming it was there,' says Laura, 'and how quickly the time went. We all sat at a round table: Gérard with his immortal pencil, Isabey whose talent may be imitated but never equalled, Garnery who made so charmingly detailed a drawing of the room that you could recognize the very chair legs. Oil and water-colour paints lay about on a table, and anybody could sketch as he pleased while listening to the songs. "Handsome Dunois," "With Sighs I saw the Dawn," and a hundred others,' says Laura, 'which I could quote, for I know them all. I love them and I sing them still.' Laura, in conclusion, quotes the following lines that were much in fashion:

'She longed that all might love her:
And they did.
Everyone.'

Everybody, beginning with the Emperor, shut their eyes to the charming Hortense's adventures, even when they were on the point of bearing visible fruit. In this way, during the months preceding the birth of the Duc de Morny, out of friendship for the Princess everyone refused to recognize the evidence.

A few years previously, during a period of mourning, she had met in the Pyrenees, Decazes, 'the sweet pea,' as he was then called, who had come to lament his wife during a bereavement that was not to last long. They had wept together. Decazes was so attractive as a widower. Others had followed, of whom one was an Admiral, so they said. Not long before, a mysterious scandal had agitated the peaceful Rue Cerutti. There was a fight going on at dawn behind closed doors in the Queen's house. Two of the handsomest men under the Empire, Auguste de Colbert and Flahaut, the reigning cavalier, were at each other's throats: the shouts of the combatants could be heard all over the neighbourhood.

The Emperor had visited his wrath on M. de Montrond, who was out of favour at the time, but had taken no part in the brawl between the two gallants. Nevertheless he was placed under supervision at Châtillon and had to pay for the crockery broken by the two resplendent officers. The ultimate consequence of all this uproar, according to Laura, had been the ruin of her brother Albert de Permon, her good Albert, Commissioner of Police at Marseilles, who had not been able to prevent Montrond slipping through his fingers after a Homeric chase by one of Savary's agents.

For the moment Flahaut was supreme. In recognition of his services, Hortense had got him gazetted A.D.C. to the Emperor.

Queen Hortense always seems to suggest a romantic ornament above a clock, – 'handsome Dunois' embarking on a sea of gilded bronze. In reality the Queen always had a 'handsome Dunois' in her life: his face and appearance changed, but it was always the 'handsome Dunois.' The Queen had a weakness for a uniform. 'Among all the homage that a woman can receive, there is always something more chivalrous about a soldier's admiration which one cannot help finding flattering.' There was a charming young lancer in the house,[1] Brack by name, 'Adonis in the armour of Mars,' wrote his friend Ricard, adding: 'Queen Hortense, who had very good taste in such matters, encouraged the young officer: he ventured to fall on his knees, and was overcome with surprise to find himself in the Queen's arms when he recovered his composure. The liaison lasted for a long time without any injury to MM. F., B., etc., etc., etc., etc. [*sic*].'

Nevertheless Maurice had just been appointed Chamberlain and, said M. de C . . ., 'I know a lovely Princess who would be only too glad to entrust him with her key.' Maurice had every opportunity of amusing himself. Junot's return had given him some momentary breathing space; he continued to exasperate Laura's jealousy over Madame de Flotte, not without reason, as the future will show.

Probably Queen Hortense, without making the first advances, betrayed the agitation which was habitually aroused in her by the sight of a handsome young man. It is not impossible. As in every court intrigue, as soon as the Queen was sure of her own feelings, her part consisted in the display of a persistent graciousness intended to convey that she was ready to be kind.

[1] Brack was said to be the lover of Mademoiselle de Mars.

Laura had no definite suspicions. For a little while, or rather, for a few days, the female friends of both parties saw nothing: at last Madame de Bréhan, who could bear her discretion no longer, began to talk. This lady had a good deal of influence in the Princess Borghèse's household: and Pauline's absence gave her a good deal of leisure. She occupied herself in the distribution of malicious gossip with the utmost expedition. 'Her malignant mind,' says Laura, 'characteristically French, was always active, only her eagerness sometimes carried her further than she intended.'

Laura wrote to Maurice:

"My husband is being bled to-morrow morning (Thursday) and will not leave his bed all day. Come at 3 o'clock precisely. I must speak to you definitely and very seriously about a number of things. Do not fail to bring your little niece with you. I have made many arrangements since this morning: now, if you love me as much as you say you do, if we are careful, we can still be happy. But I will only take the trouble to be careful as long as I have the assurance that I am loved. If that is really so, then there is nothing that I will not do. Maurice, Maurice, you know that I worship you, you know it, and you love me too. But Queen H . . .? But you tell me it isn't true and I believe you rather than Madame de Bre . . . who told me this fine story last evening.

"Come without fail at 3 o'clock and leave your carriage at the door. I will tell you why."

As far as the Parisians were concerned, in 1813 the Abrantès' mansion was still the Governor's house. With the two sentries at the door the glories of the great days had

returned. But it was a swan song. A horde of aides-de-camp, secretaries, hussar officers, contractors, and, more especially, creditors, were continually hustling the Duke's servants in their purple liveries with yellow facings laced with gold. From the porch to the stables it was a continual procession of porters, footmen, and postillions. The Duke's carriages and servants might be left below to wait in the snow, but the house preserved its treasure, the envy of all Paris: Harvey, the Master-Cook, – whose touch the privileged guests, admitted to taste his masterpieces on Thursdays, could recognize in the mere flavour of a soup. A house was more distinguished by the possession of Harvey than by five centuries of unimpeachable lineage. From time to time, to occupy his royal leisure, he condescended to give advice to the Duke's son, whom he considered a very bright boy. 'He became interested in "the little Napoleon," ' says Théodore de Banville, 'made him his pupil and taught him cooking, – that is to say everything – history, geography, botany, physics, chemistry, and more especially philosophical speculation of the subtlest kind, for his art had so many aspects that he had to have some acquaintance with every subject.'

(Incidentally, Théodore de Banville in his Mémoirs confuses Harvey and his rival Carême.)

Laura had gone back to her little green bed on the first floor. Alone in the great blue room, now become his own, Junot lay in a state of coma; sometimes he breaks into sobbing; sometimes, with dull distorted eyes, he scrawls the following sentences: 'We, Duc d'Abrantès, Grand Officer of the Empire, Colonel-in-Chief of Hussars, Governor of Paris, Grand Eagle of the Legion of Honour, Grand Cross of the Order of Christ, Commander of the Royal Order of

the Iron Crown . . . ex-Governor General, and General in Chief of the French army in Portugal. . . .'

Then he begins again and there follow interminable repetitions of the same phrases: 'then,' says Laura, 'he smooths his hair back and throws it aside as if to shake off a burden and cool his burning brow.'

From time to time he recovered control of himself: like all general paralytics there were times when Junot realized his condition. In his lucid moments he concealed his dementia and tried to find plausible explanations for his disordered conduct. But he felt the beast in his brain gaining on him more and more. The following singular letter, which makes the diagnosis of his condition clearer than all the evidence of the seventeen doctors who were successively called into consultation, dates from this period.

"My dear Joseph, you know what a state I was in the day before yesterday: well, yesterday I was no longer depressed but my mind was confused. *Do not do anything I told you.* Just come and see me: there is no one with me. Always yours,

'THE DUKE.' "

If his brain was disordered his affairs were inextricably so. Woe to the too persistent creditor who managed to run the Duke to earth in his apartments. Junot fell upon him sword in hand, and sometimes there followed a hue and cry through the corridors of the house, to the infinite entertainment of the neighbours, as the Emperor told Las Cases.

At this time Junot's devotion to his master had become an obsession: 'he worshipped him as one to whom his life was forfeit,' says Thiébaut, rather wide of the mark.

'After a particularly wild day he had become tolerably calm: such attacks were always followed by a kind of armistice with his disease,' says Laura; 'M. de Flahaut had come to ask us to dinner.'

Laura evidently attracted Flahaut; their common discomfiture drew them together and there was no better way of finding out how the other was progressing than by entering upon an intimacy which might arouse a wholesome jealousy in their betrayers.

The dinner was dismal. As it was known the Duke would be present, all manner of friends, old and new, eagerly came to get news of him. Maurice was among them. It was an incredible medley of artists, parasites, and great noblemen, the women were coquettish and sentimental – all of them in a greater or lesser degree Laura's 'little cousins' – the significance of the relationship in this connection will no doubt be recalled. The men were of all sorts, from the military colleagues of the host who were obliged to be present, to M. Charles, ex-admirer of Joséphine, not to mention Narbonne, Girardin, and Cardinal Maury, gourmets all and devotees of burgundy. Richepanse was the only water-drinker with whom Junot would consent to shake hands. Last of all, dominating the assemblage, was Duroc, Duc de Frioul, incarnation of the Master, and his Grand Marshal.

Duroc had been passionately in love with Queen Hortense when she was Mademoiselle de Beauharnais. Joséphine did not object to Duroc, but she had wanted a Bonaparte for a son-in-law. 'The wound took a long time to heal,' says Laura in speaking of Duroc's love which he had confided to her, 'and for a long while he could not forgive those who had destroyed both his moral and his political life.' Duroc had finally consoled himself in the

arms of Laura, his confidante. That evening, as on all evenings in that month of February, 'the company talked, played billiards, sketched at a table strewn with drawing blocks, made music, or embroidered, for which frames were provided: moreover the library adjoined the billiard-room and anyone who liked could turn over the pages of the finest editions. At midnight tea was served, and supper followed. It was the pleasantest hour of the day.'

Flahaut sang. Mademoiselle Ducrest tells us that he had a voice of very wide compass: he never refused to sing and this made it all the more agreeable. It was doubtless Madame Regnault de St. Jean d'Angely who followed his example: she too 'was always ready to sing without being asked. She was a handsome woman, particularly in profile, but she was too well aware of it.'

It is useless for Laura to tell us in her *Salons de Paris*, 'that Madame Regnault de St. Jean d'Angely is a woman I have known for a long time and whom I have always liked.' It was not so in 1813. The two women were divided by an ancient rivalry. They had both been in favour with Metternich at the same time.

Napoléon d'Abrantès, in his *Boudoirs de Paris*, tells us an amazing story about this that he evidently had from his family. Metternich wanted to present the lady with a necklace: she employed the following stratagem to get her husband to accept it. An obliging jeweller offered the necklace to the unimpeachable Regnault at a very low price. Regnault bought it, and while his wife was congratulating herself on her dexterity, Regnault hurried away and re-sold it for a large sum. On his return he gave her a present of five hundred francs to spend on clothes, explaining that he had just done an excellent piece of business, the remark

being accompanied by a highly significant look. 'With or without the necklace,' says Laura, 'she had the perfect type of Greek head with its pure contours; a magnificent figure; her teeth were a little prominent but they had no other fault. . . . Madame Regnault had never worn stays – she was a ravishing creature.' And Maurice was quite carried away by her.

Flahaut then proposed a game of billiards. Junot was to play with Laura. Still gloomy, dragging himself about the room, the Duc d'Abrantès began the game.

'It was useless to attempt to compete with Junot at billiards,' says 'La Contemporaine.' 'He knew all there was to know about the game, and could carry out any sort of stroke. It was he who invented the instrument for scraping the end of the cue without interrupting the game: and for this he received the compliments of great noblemen, great diplomats, bishops and princes.'

He won: 'the stake,' he said, 'was the affection of the Emperor, and he had won: so the Emperor still loved him.' And for a few hours he was a different being. Junot was transfigured.

General paralysis, the G.P.I. of the doctors, is the only disease that can produce these miraculous metamorphoses. In place of the heavy bent figure with the besotted face, the Aide-de-camp of the Emperor, with his fiery glance, came once again to life. Resplendent with his decorations and his glorious scars, he moved from group to group, radiating youth and gaiety. 'In very truth,' says Laura, 'I had never seen him as he was that evening.' Meantime Maurice and the lovely Regnault were talking in low tones, very likely on that 'love of a sofa' that Jacob had designed for the Abrantès' home.

"The woman who has designs upon you, and about whom I was speaking to you the other day, is Madame Regnault. I am quite sure she did everything she could to attract you. I am not jealous of a person of that kind, though your conduct must necessarily often humiliate me a great deal and make me distrust my attitude. She came to see me the other day on purpose (so I am told) to meet you. Very well, I want her to come again, and use in your presence all her means of allurement. I am not certain enough of your heart not to test it as well as I can. Your conduct to me is so far from being frank and loyal, so devoid of even the semblance of regard, that I am quite justified in demanding something more than mere words to convince me. You must forgive me this distrust, Maurice, but in the last two days I have seen *certain people who loved me and still love me*. I have carefully remarked the ways in which their feelings showed themselves and compared them with yours: the result of my reflections has been very painful, because I do not love you any the less and I realize that I am not loved."

'Certain people, etc.'; she means Duroc, though he was very soon thrown over. Madame de Regnault did not belong to any circle, but Queen Hortense adored her. Gradually Laura began to see clearly. Madame Regnault was working for the Queen of Holland under her very nose.

"I have again heard that Madame R . . . seems to have engaged you for a ball that she is giving to-morrow. I don't forbid you to go, but you know what I feel about it. *As I am absolutely certain that she wants to get you to her house simply to get hold of you*, I am surely within my rights in not wishing you to go. Think of how you will act in such

an eventuality; she is very capricious, but I am the more distressed at your having become involved with someone who cannot touch your heart in any way. I say nothing of the sacrifice I have just made for you, because, loving you as I do, that is nothing, but it ought to give you an example of love and utter renunciation of everything that is not concerned with the beloved.

"Good-bye: till to-morrow, Monday.

"*Sunday evening.*

"By the way, how went your presentation of this morning?"

This last sentence helps us to date this letter about February 20th.

Maurice appears to have suggested to Laura brotherly friendship. She replies ironically:

"Your presence the other day would not have offended me *if you had been alone*: that you know, indeed you know it perfectly well. I am certain of it because I now know the real nature of your behaviour. You would certainly have done better to be frank with me. This method would have been much more successful with me, but it would not have had such a wholesome effect as the one you used on the evening of the day before yesterday. You wanted to annoy and humiliate me, so as to give the impression that you were punishing me, when you yourself ought to have been asking for my forgiveness. However, let us dismiss the matter. Let us bury the past in a profound oblivion. We may only preserve the recollection of it to add charm to our friendship. Besides I am under a real obligation to you: our relations would have poisoned my life and filled

it with sorrow: I was going to ruin the life of someone who ought not to be made to suffer, and whose troubles are the source of the most bitter regret to me. I thank you for having made me see in time the sacrifice I was about to make for *you*. You may be sure that this *alone* effaces any slight resentment that I may feel towards you.

"Good-bye; I hope I have helped you to find a second sister: tell me if you would like to be my second brother.

"Let me know the day when you are coming to see me. I might be out, and as it is essential that I should talk to you I should be most disappointed if I were not at home. Try to come soon."

Chapter IX

EVENTS began to move. In spite of his irreparable blunders in Russia, Junot was kindly received by the Emperor, so true it is that Napoleon never entirely broke with those who had been his friends. On February 20th he was appointed Governor of Venice and the Illyrian Provinces.

The Shakespearean drama begins. The Emperor was sending as his lieutenant, with full and absolute powers, a madman: and this in a far-off country where communications were bad and no one could possibly dispute his delirious projects however much in the public interest such opposition might be. A lunatic would be in complete control and command and, in the last resort, there would be no appeal against his edicts. The position was probably unique in modern times.

It may be asked why the Emperor appointed Junot to this distant post when, during his brief proconsulate, comedy and tragedy alternately held the stage. The real cause of it must be looked for in the scandal at Mortefontaine. Since Laura's exile had been decided, it was just as well to kill two birds with one stone, and get rid of those tiresome Junots once and for all. The wife would follow the Duke her husband to Illyria. The method had succeeded first after the Metternich scandal in 1809. The Junots had gone to make up their differences in Spain. This time they would reconstruct their domestic relations by the shores of the Adriatic. But on the previous occasion Metternich was in Vienna, while now Maurice was remaining in Paris. Laura refuses to go, she will not go . . . she defies Rovigo, the Emperor, and everyone else. "I defy them to take me

away,' she writes to Maurice. Evidence as to what actually happened is wanting, but we know that Laura entrenched herself in her house: she said she was dying; – she will get a divorce, and that will make her departure unnecessary. At last, in some mysterious way, she obtained what she wanted more than anything in the world – a reprieve.

It was clearly Duroc who got it for her, Duroc who was perhaps delighted to do an ill turn to the cruel Hortense, for Laura's reprieve was hardly conducive to the smooth progress of the Queen's new love affair. There must have been some mysterious bargain between Laura, Duroc and the Emperor. Hints of it may be found in Laura's Memoirs, but no clear explanation is given. Laura was evidently trying to get back into favour in order to obtain this much-sought-after respite. She alleges that she had received from London, in an opera score, a proclamation written by the future Louis XVIII from Hartwell, and she asked Duroc to convey this 'unique document' to the Emperor, without, of course, saying anything to Junot, 'who would have been upset to no purpose.' 'I am for the Emperor, in this matter, what you and Junot are for me.' The story is a mass of intrigue and dissimulation of all kinds. Nevertheless the Emperor was probably grateful and the postponement was sanctioned.

"To complete my misery, if you only knew what I have heard about you to-day. Is it really true that you are being unfaithful to me? Ah! Maurice, I was very far from expecting what was told me, and it is, indeed, not the least among all my troubles.

" However I hope I shall not be leaving until *May*, that is to say two months after the Duke. If you only knew

DUKE OF ABRANTES

JUNOT, DUC D'ABRANTÈS

the state I am in. I defy them to take me away, now. Oh! my dear, if I could die upon your heart in the certainty that I alone possessed it, I should still think myself happy: but you have betrayed me, and for a woman *whom I had never suspected*. Maurice, does my love deserve such treason? What have I done but adore you, sacrifice everything for you, my life, and my existence, and now you betray me. Ah! tell me that those who told me so are liars: I love you too much not to repudiate their accusations.

"Good-bye: *come and see me on Thursday evening. You must be careful of my reputation at the present moment and for that reason you must come and see me as often as possible*. I cannot be answerable for myself, I love you too much. I must see you. It is the only joy I have left. I must see you, and I warn you I am capable of any imprudence; and anything of the kind would ruin us both. Our fate is in your hands. Let me see you often, often, or I cannot say what I may do."

Again:

"Very well then, we shall both be ruined. In my present state, when I am beside myself, and only you can bring me back to reason, you speak to me of friendship! Friendship! to me! You tell me that you will always be *my friend*! I read your pitiful letter, I don't know why I did not order my carriage and come to you myself to upbraid you for your heartlessness and then die at your feet, – yes, die, because life is unendurable; but in behaving thus you will ruin me and yourself as well. The Author of my ruin will never be forgiven. I have worshipped you and at this moment I love you more than ever. I was happy this morn-

ing because I had just had permission to delay my departure until the first days of June, on account of the state of my health. But now I do not care. You are already in love with someone else, and I see clearly that *what was said to me about you and Queen Hortense is only too true.*

"Since you love me no longer, since your love has already vanished, I need trouble myself no more. My married life has long been a nightmare. To-morrow I shall begin negotiations for a separation – I shall then at least be able to lament in freedom the misery of having been betrayed in what I held most sacred and most dear. As for our friendship, you may keep it. In my present state such a suggestion is an insult. Friendship, Maurice, to one who cannot live without your love! You dare to offer her your friendship! You may as well bid the poor creature die. Without your love, her existence, her good name, her life even, are worthless.

"I was quite sure that at the first difficulty, all that love of which you have spoken to me would disappear into smoke, but can it be that *all you have left is friendship*? My poor head is on fire. I no longer know what I am doing or saying. Twenty times in the last hour I have been on the point of coming to see you. I do not know what to do. I can only love you and hope for death.

"Write to me, speak to me, and above all let me see you. I am within an ace of ruining myself and you with me. You alone can keep me back, remember that. Ah! Maurice, what a letter you wrote to me! Come to-morrow: why not between three and four o'clock, and bring your niece with you?

"Good-bye: just one word that you love me and I shall be at peace."

Junot at last decided to leave at the end of March. 'The house,' Laura writes, 'is littered with trunks and packing cases: and the courtyard is full of travelling carriages and waggons.' Everything portended the forthcoming departure of the master of the house.

"Friday will *not* do: you must come on Thursday as I told you. The Duke is leaving on Saturday evening and on the day before his departure the doors will be closed to everyone. I could, therefore, only see you on the Sunday. If it is not inconvenient, please do what you agreed. However, I shall be surprised at nothing, though I may be greatly upset. I know very well that, although the slightest possible reason may be enough to detain you, it will be enough to make me cry all day, though that will not make a minute's difference to your plans: you will tell me I am foolish, and then you will think you have behaved admirably and like a true man of honour. It seems to me that a man can have little regard for honour, and indeed betrays it grossly when, like you, not a day passes, that he does not torment a woman who placed her happiness in his hands and, for her only reward, has found bitterness and tears.

"Good-bye: this letter will perhaps make you angry and give you an excellent reason for not seeing me for a week. I don't think you feel much distress when I reproach you: I am too accustomed to see you contemplate my tears with dry eyes. Ah! Maurice, I have heard a great deal about your want of heart: and about my extravagant behaviour, and my folly in becoming involved with someone who does not love me: yes, who does not love me. That is what someone was telling me two hours since.

"Good-bye. If it is fine to-morrow, be in the Bois de

Boulogne between half-past two and three o'clock. I shall certainly be there."

Junot departed. Life, which had come to a standstill for an instant, went on once more. The Emperor was collecting recruits. He had been in Paris for three months.

'Paris was a desert,' says Laura. 'The women whose husbands were away, went to their Estates in the country. Only those stayed who, like me, had some compelling reason to keep them in town. My pregnancy continued. . . . One evening, as darkness was falling, I was coming back in my landau from the Bois de Boulogne. Prince Poniatowski had recognized my livery. . . . Prince Joseph had one of those sympathetic faces that appeal to everybody. He was a fine-looking man.'

Poniatowski, who was accompanied by Narbonne, made Laura leave her carriage and took her for a walk along the gardens of the Faubourg St. Honoré, to smell the fragrance of the early lilac.

'The air was balmy and the night so lovely that we stayed very late, wishing to prolong a moment of happiness at a time when they were so rare.'

Laura saw Prince Joseph again: she wrote to Maurice:

"I have seen the *great personage* who drove up behind me the other day. I will tell you all about it this evening. Good-bye, my dear, good-bye, – you whom I adore, and whom I am so proud and so happy to love. Good-bye, my darling angel. Come early if possible.

"Good-bye, once more."

The Emperor left Paris on April 14th, and the campaign began at once. Bessières was killed on May 1st.

'He was a friend both of Junot and myself,' wrote Laura, on receiving a letter from Duroc, 'which,' she goes on, 'I dare not open now, because it contains tidings of death.'

On the evening of Bautzen, on May 22nd, just as victory was complete, Duroc was hit in the stomach by a bullet. His agony was frightful. It was to Laura he wrote his last letter.

'Although I am quite exhausted I cannot let the courier go without giving you news of me. . . . Another victory; it seems as though a fortunate presentiment prevented my sealing my letter. . . . I am distressed about you. . . .'

This is what Laura wrote to Maurice:

"I have just heard of the death of one of my intimate friends, and I have been greatly upset. I shall not feel better until I have laid my head upon your heart. You know, my dear, there is no sorrow that one look from your dear eyes cannot banish from my mind.

"I was saying the other day, *I am grateful to you for loving you so much.* I owe all the sweetest moments of my life to my love for you.

"Good-bye, my dear."

Queen Hortense, in her turn, heard of Duroc's death. She sighed wearily, as indeed did the whole Empire. 'Must all our friends perish like this? When shall we have peace?'

The Emperor was once more victorious, but he was conscious of the increasing concentration of Europe against France as a result even of his victories, which betrayed the weakness of his formations and his lack of cavalry.

With almost equal forces, Napoleon on the one side and Europe on the other were watching each other before entering on the final struggle. It was a lull, though a far

from uneventful one, that was to last two and a half months.

Then began that display of hypocrisy known as the Congress of Prague. None of the combatants really wanted peace. The Comte Louis de Narbonne, Laura's dearest and most affectionate friend, according to her Memoirs at any rate, was one of Napoleon's two plenipotentiaries. We are fortunate enough to have before us the unpublished diary of his last colleague.

"M. de Narbonne's conversation," writes General Baron X. . . ., "as informing as it was lively, formed an agreeable interlude to the mournful speculations that inevitably occupied our minds. It was then that he gave the details of the Congress of Prague, and the Emperor's obstinacy, and it was he who told me that the latter was misguided enough, before the Moscow Campaign, to require the Emperor Alexander to admit French Customs' Officers to Cronstadt, to ensure that the continental blockade was properly carried out. He spoke calmly and without bitterness of the exile to which he had been condemned as a result of the frankness with which he had expressed himself as to the danger of making the claims he had been forced to put forward at the Congress of Prague."

In Paris, after the departure of her husband the Duke, Laura was leading a very quiet life, waiting, as she says, until her health should permit her to rejoin her husband. As a matter of fact she was sulky and impatient and found it difficult to control her bad temper. She realized that she was under the closest surveillance. The Minister of Police was a constant visitor, indeed he came rather too often, for the Duc de Rovigo was exceedingly interested in Laura

and her circle, for a reason which will become apparent later.

At that time the wife of General Thomière[1] who had, like so many others, just been killed in Spain, came to stay in the Rue des Champs Élysées. Agatha Thomière with her 'still open wound' naturally found an echo in Laura's bitterness against a régime which would 'devour them all.'

Savary's agents, of which the house was full, kept him informed of the diatribes of the two women. He came and remonstrated sharply with Laura but used a rather unfortunate expression, as he often did.

'That Thomière woman,' said he, 'poor snivelling creature!'

But Savary was unlucky in his adversary. The Duchesse d'Abrantès, who treated the Emperor like a schoolboy, very soon disposed of the Duc de Rovigo.

Laura's ill-humour arose, as may be supposed, from Maurice's behaviour. He was immovable, and categorically refused to come back to the Rue des Champs Élysées, notwithstanding the 'rights' invoked by his mistress.

"4 *a.m.*

"Ah! Maurice, have I not the most sacred claims upon you that excuse my insistence. But I ask for nothing. I am content to suffer and to despair. Oh, how you hurt me! You are betraying me. Yes, you are basely betraying me and I must endure it. No, I cannot! I ought to prevent your being false to a woman who for nine months has not ceased for one moment to adore you, who has the right to all your affection, and who is united to you now by the most sacred *bonds*. Maurice, you are mine: you belong to

[1] He was in command of the base at Torgau.

no one else. You are my love, my happiness, and the father of the being I bear within me. Come back to-day: say what you like to the world, but come back to me. Don't you understand, Maurice, that your friend, your only friend, she who loves you more than life, – your wife, commands you in the name of the love you say you feel for her, to be with her to-day.

"Maurice, do you understand? I ask you, I insist, in the name of your love and of mine and of the life within me, which must prevent you having any wish that is not mine."

We have found not a little difficulty in identifying this fresh 'betrayal' by Maurice, and yet it was owing to this incident that it has proved possible to clear up several historical points.

We must penetrate to the interior of the Ministry of Police to disentangle the wires that moved the Savary pair. He, as we know, was a sly Sganarelle with 'a magnificent manner.' As for the Duchesse, née Fodoas, she had been brought up at Madame Campan's establishment with Queen Hortense and little Zoë-Victoire Talon, future Comtesse du Cayla, who was to become the mistress of Louis XVIII: for the time being, she was the mistress of Rovigo.

The Duchesse de Rovigo, on her part, was engaged in a most romantic affair with General Sebastiani. In days gone by he had paid assiduous court to Laura. Laura alleges in her *Diary*, published by M. Turquan, that she resisted his gallant attacks and even suspected him of an understanding with Caroline Murat, her mortal enemy.

'General Sebastiani was a Corsican,' says Laura. 'My mother liked him well enough, but being a great lady herself she looked down on the son of the Ajaccio cooper, and I

had to some extent been brought up in this attitude of mind. A tolerable figure, a small répertoire of ghost stories, – these trifling gifts had endowed him with an intolerable assurance and self-conceit. . . .'

The Comtesse du Cayla, who provided Rovigo with the most agreeable solace for his domestic troubles, was a plump little woman, very clever and eaten up with ambition. She was in close touch with the aristocratic circles and did innumerable services for her innumerable friends.

Pasquier relates that the Duchesse de Rovigo, having surprised her husband and Madame du Cayla in the same bed in her own house, poured a can of water over them, to the infinite delight of the establishment. The Chancellor adds gravely that he had the facts from a witness who happened to be in a neighbouring room and ran immediately to tell him all about it half an hour afterwards.

Now Madame du Cayla – this was quite unknown till recently – was on her part engaged in an affair with – Maurice.

"I heard to-day the most positive details of your affair with Madame Duqu . . .," writes Laura on June 8th, 1813.

Maurice and Zoë-Victoire probably met at the Hôtel Cerutti, perhaps even in that famous bedroom which had just been 'hung with white cashmere richly fringed with gold: the bed and window curtains were of Indian muslin embroidered in gold.'

The intimacy between Queen Hortense and the Comtesse du Cayla, which dated from school-days, grew daily closer. Soon Zoë-Victoire dined with Hortense at the Hôtel Cerutti 'quite alone and without servants, we waited on ourselves,' she writes. Frédéric Masson adds, and he must

take the responsibility for his opinion: 'Hortense was under the influence of feelings that we need not specify.'

However this may be, Hortense had left for Aix, and Maurice and Zoë-Victoire entered upon the most agreeable romance.

In the world that gravitated round the houses of the Empresses and Princesses, these notable ladies formed a little circle of their own. The men bestowed them on one another, exchanged them, took them back again, and the play went on as before on a stage decorated in the antique manner and furnished with highly uncomfortable sofas. Hence the most violent hatreds and jealousies.

It is possible that Rovigo was aware of this fresh domestic trouble and that this was a further reason for detesting the Junots and all their belongings.

The meetings between the mistress of the Minister of Police and the Queen of Mortefontaine's Chamberlain, who were already under observation, presented considerable difficulty, and Rovigo's agents must have laughed in their sleeves at their master's double ill-luck.

The lovers conceived a plan as simple as it was ingenious. Queen Julie was to spend a season at Vichy, and it so happened that Madame du Cayla's mother had gone to take a cure there. Every one was off to Vichy, even the Princess of Sweden and her faithful Madame de Flotte. The trip would be a pendant to the season at Aix in the preceding year, except that Laura's place would be taken by Zoë-Victoire.

"MADRID, *June 8th.*

"Maurice, I cannot get the truth out of you about your trip to Vichy. Yet more than ever I insist on your telling

it me. I beg you as a favour and you must not refuse. A few days ago I was given a very detailed account of your *liaison* with Madame Duqu . . ., who is to be there, as well as that odious creature who has injured me so deeply, and whom, for that reason, you ought to hate, and yet you love her still. I cannot endure the torture of knowing you to be in the company of women who make me so jealous that they destroy my peace of mind, which may now affect my child. Think this over carefully and regulate your conduct accordingly.

"I have been very unwell for several days. I have had such awful shocks that the machine has been terribly shaken. This evening I am in such a state of collapse that I feel like death. For two days I have had no news of you. Oh! Maurice, Maurice, I feel sure that you are trying to leave me, that you wish to leave me: so much coldness is not natural, but why dissimulate? Be frank and truthful. You were never afraid to wound my heart, and not long ago when that woman treated me so brutally what did you do to console me? Nothing, merely a word or two of random courtesy.

"Good-bye. I am too sad to write any more. My heart is full of sorrow, and it is you, Maurice, that are the cause of it. You are unfaithful to me: I am as sure of it as of my own unhappy love."

On the next day Laura wrote:

"What is the mystery about this visit to Vichy? One who is to accompany the Q . . . must inevitably know all about it. Maurice, if I have ever had any influence over you, and if this influence has latterly become more sacred to you, I conjure you, I command you to tell me the truth.

"Ah! Maurice, what a monster that woman is! If you only knew what she did to me only two days ago! But no, I must say nothing: if you knew you would be too furious.

"Good-bye, my dear. I am dreadfully ill and to complete my misfortunes I am away from you. Tell me exactly when you come back; you must know. Tell me about Vichy and tell me the truth about everything.

"Good-bye. I press you to my heart, that heart that you have so wounded with your coldness and your cruelty, but which must ever love you."

Madame de Rémusat, who spent the summer of that year at Vichy, gives us a few details about the season.

Queen Julie behaved as usual like the kind homely creature she was. As for Désirée, 'her blotchy complexion was enough to make one shudder.'

By the banks of the Allier one might come upon a pair of turtle doves: it was the lovely Laura Régnault, whom a conjugal reconciliation had brought back to her husband's arms.

Finally Madame du Cayla, the dowager, who seems to have guessed the plans of Zoë-Victoire and of Maurice, was apparently exceedingly anxious that M. de Jaucourt, her brother, should be in exclusive attendance on Queen Julie. This was arranged, and Madame de Rémusat adds innocently:

'I passed an hour with young Madame du Cayla who is a charming woman. We had a good talk. She has, like me, a leaning towards the religious life.' No doubt Zoë-Victoire promised herself a liberal allowance of transgression in the course of it.

On the return of the Bourbons, although 'her son was far

too like the Duc de Rovigo,' as Pasquier says, Madame du Cayla, who had become an irreproachable Royalist, blotted out her past by a stroke of the pen. To achieve this, she suppressed half her Christian name, and Zoë-Victoire became simply Zoë. It was dangerous to be too 'victorious' in those days.

Chapter X

JUNOT was at Trieste on May 25th. The Emperor no longer intended to keep the Illyrian Provinces. This medley of peoples was of little value to him. But it was something in hand to bargain with at the forthcoming Congress of Prague.

The Governor-General was directly responsible to the Emperor. Between Napoleon and Junot, his lieutenant, there was no one, except, in theory, Eugène Beauharnais, Viceroy of Italy, but he was a long way off and knew little of what was going on. The entire country was under the sway of a madman. This tragi-comedy, quite in the antique manner, lasted for three months.

Junot had indeed a civil assistant, the Comte de Chabrol, who was called Inspector-General. He was a most able administrator of the kind that were so well trained by the Emperor in his Council of State. But Chabrol had been confined to his bed for weeks. His illness, which has hitherto passed unnoticed, explains why Junot's wild edicts met with no opposition.

Almost all the authentic evidence for this escapade has been published except Chabrol's correspondence, which is preserved in the Archives and gives us some information of the first importance.

In Illyria there was a young librarian, by name Charles Nodier, who later on, in his edition of the Memoirs of Ida de Saint Elme (called 'La Contemporaine'), was to describe the scenes of which he had been a witness. These details are quite reliable, for they correspond exactly with the symptoms of general paralysis which, as we know, had begun to attack Junot.

At first the maniacal actions of the Duc d'Abrantès surprised his staff very little. Junot was known to have 'a headstrong and fiery temper.' As soon as he arrived he had an inexplicable quarrel with Colonel Garnier who wrote to General Clark, the War Minister:

'The Duke's bad temper is set down to his state of health, especially when the wind is in the south-west.'

Shortly afterwards, Junot threw into prison a certain lawyer who, as the result of domestic troubles, refused to make an allowance to his wife, and, although the case was before the courts, had the man unmercifully flogged. The effect was instantaneous. The lawyer became once more a model husband and paid all that was due. When the Emperor heard of it he ordered an enquiry.

Finally, the famous story of the ball at Ragusa dates, no doubt, from this period: Arthur Chuquet alone questions its authenticity.

It seems that Junot had issued invitations for a reception at Ragusa to which all the nobility of the town had been invited. At ten o'clock an enormous assemblage, composed mainly of civil and even religious dignitaries, relieved here and there by ladies in brilliant toilettes, were crowded together in the reception rooms. The Governor was said to be still at his toilet. At last a footman in a uniform heavily laced with gold flung open the doors of the Duke's private apartments and announced in stentorian tones:

'My Lord the Duc d'Abrantès, Governor-General, and Lieutenant of his Majesty the Emperor and King!' And Junot appeared, wearing white gloves, his hair elaborately curled, patent leather shoes on his feet, and his orders round his neck: his sword was under one arm and an immense

plumed hat under the other . . . otherwise he was as naked as when he was born.

There followed an indescribable tumult. Mothers dragged their children away, bishops covered their faces with their hands: 'in an instant the rooms were emptied.' But as Junot had a lively reputation, the incident passed off as a barrack-room joke, in doubtful taste, but nothing more.

If this is authentic, it must have happened during the tour of inspection which Junot undertook at the beginning of June, a tour which he was never able to complete.

The scenes described by 'La Contemporaine' took place after the Governor's return to Trieste, that is to say in the first three weeks of the month of June. We must discount all the romantic farrago that surrounds the heroine of these Memoirs which were written to order.

Nodier lets us witness a dinner given by Junot.

'A lady of twenty or twenty-five years of age did the honours of the table: she was as pretty as any woman can be who has no features, and as amiable as anyone can be without being accustomed to decent society. The Duc d'Abrantès was polite, too polite, in the manner of a man who is not naturally so. The day I dined there, the Governor had the idea of adding variety to the liquid refreshment by sending round a bottle of sulphuric ether. After refusals which may be supposed to have been unanimous he filled a glass and drained it, amid the somewhat constrained applause of the company.'

On another occasion he paraded two battalions of Croats, had the tocsin rung and drums beaten, for the purpose of killing a nightingale. . . . The next surprise was a vast conspiracy organized by all the sheep in Illyria against

which the police, the troops, and the Administration were warned to take special measures.

Then followed the aberration which is always found in certain cases of general paralysis. One fine day Junot disappeared in the streets of Gorizia. He was discovered in the house of a half wit. 'Attracted by a similarity of odd propensities, he established as his Pylades, a lunatic of perfectly unblemished character,' says Nodier, who adds, 'the Duc d'Abrantès decorated his friend with the insignia of the Legion of Honour, and indeed invested him with his own Cordon.'

Another witness gives further details. 'The poor creature (the lunatic) wandered about the streets of Gorizia as proud as a peacock wearing the Grand Cross of the Order instituted by Napoleon, and making very sarcastic jokes on the subject of his decoration. . . . The Duc d'Abrantès often accompanied him.'

'No power,' Nodier continues, 'could replace the Emperor's Lieutenant, or exercise his functions for a moment, without an order from his Majesty.'

'The Viceroy,' reports a witness, 'who was asked at Udine, where he had come to spend a few days, what could be done, replied: "Send despatches to the Emperor and wait for his reply." '

However, we have a report of an officer of gendarmerie, a Lieutenant Poiré, dated June 25th, of which the following is a summary.

On that day Junot asked the Deputy-Governor to dinner. The meal, begun at midday, was still proceeding at 7.30 in the evening: it was washed down with copious draughts of wine. On leaving the table, the Duc d'Abrantès got into his carriage, but changed his mind, climbed on to the box,

took the place of the coachman, whipped-up – the postillion, and began to drive round the town at full gallop. While on his way, he shouted to the women whose heads appeared at the windows. All his servants left him except one favourite groom who from time to time threw a bottle up in the air which Junot brought down with a pistol shot. When he got back to the Palace, he toyed for a time with the sister-in-law of one of his servants, and then gave her a 'rendezvous' for after supper. The poor girl was terrified and incontinently fled to Trieste. Tired of waiting for the lady, Junot had the Croats and Gendarmes in the garrison paraded – with orders to 'arrest them' wherever they 'found them.' 'He had a table laid with a dozen covers and then fell to talking,' says the report, 'about his horses, his mighty deeds, his good looks, and finished by roaring out songs at the top of his voice.' When the company saw that his good-humour was at last restored, he was informed that 'his Excellency's orders would be punctually carried out.' Junot at last went to bed and the whole Palace heaved a sigh of relief.

The next day at nine o'clock, Junot had an attack accompanied by 'congestion in the face, aphasia, paralysis of the right leg, and distension of the mouth,' writes Lieutenant Poiré, promoted to the rank of medical officer *ad hoc*: this condition lasted for two hours.

As Chabrol was still confined to his bed, Séguier, the French Consul at Trieste, decided to inform the Viceroy of the scene that had occurred on the previous day. His letter was dated June 27th.

'M. le Duc d'Abrantès, as the result of an attack of apoplexy, is unfortunately no longer himself. At any

moment he may be seized by the most alarming paroxysms, in which he is not responsible for his acts: when the attack is over, he falls into a state of collapse in which he can do nothing, not even sign his name. . . .'

Fissont, his secretary, who was with him, hastened to Paris to warn the Duchesse d'Abrantès. On June 30th Laura writes to Maurice:

"*Wednesday 30th, 5 o'clock.*

"I feel so depressed this morning that I could well write those noble words of the Bible: 'my soul is sick unto death.' This condition is not natural: what can it mean? Can it be a presentiment?

"Strange events are about to happen in my family. F. arrived this morning. Alas! what I feared is only too true. *His mind has entirely given way.* Two attacks of paralysis, which I was not told about, have had this result, especially the last, which touched his brain. A Family Council may perhaps be summoned. I wish I could see you for I need your advice in such a delicate situation. However, he has changed his mind about the journey.

"Good-bye, my dear, love me and think of me: you may be quite sure that I never think of anybody or anything but you."

Two days later Laura, who had no doubt received further details as to her husband's condition, wrote once more to her lover and asked for his help.

"*Friday, July 2nd.*

"Although he may arrive, remember, Maurice, that you promised to come back on Tuesday. Do not break your word I do beseech you. Forthcoming events will perhaps

affect the length of your stay in Paris and I have never needed anything so much as your presence at this juncture. So I may count on you as surely as if I were sending for my brother, may I not, Maurice? Yes, I count on you, on your advice: never did I need it more. Good-bye: I am very tired and I feel ill, so I am going to bed. I shall think of you and go to sleep with your portrait on my heart."

On June 30th, Prince Eugène finally decided to inform the Emperor:

'SIRE,

'The Duc d'Abrantès is now quite definitely done for. . . .'

The Emperor replied from Dresden a week later, on July 6th.

'Let the poor man have all the care and consideration that his condition demands, but remove him at once from a country where he presents so deplorable a spectacle.'

Chabrol, urged thereto by Eugène, made an effort and left his bed. On July 6th he wrote the following two letters, which, it is thought, have not been previously published.

"*July 6th.*

"MY LORD,

"It is but two days ago that I myself was informed of M. d'Abrantès' true condition. Certain instances of irresponsibility that had been reported to me had been ascribed to the impetuosity of a naturally violent disposition. . . . Such acts as seemed to be indicative of cerebral aberration were not made known to me until the 3rd of this month. I should certainly have set out forthwith to Gorizia not-

withstanding the severe indisposition which has confined me to my bed for a month. I hope, my Lord, to reach Gorizia to-morrow and will carry out your Highness' orders with all the care which your Highness has enjoined."

Chabrol's second and much the most interesting letter is addressed to the Minister of the Interior.

"LAYBACH, *July 6th*, 1813.

"MY LORD,

"I think it my duty to lay before your Excellency certain circumstances, painful indeed, but so nearly connected with His Majesty's service, that it is unquestionably proper that you should be informed of the facts.

"Since M. le Duc d'Abrantès' arrival in these Provinces my only regular relations with him took the form of a correspondence which, until lately, was regularly maintained. The Duc had, however, spent a week at Laybach, and had been good enough to assure me of his esteem and confidence; and these sentiments continued to be apparent throughout the subsequent correspondence.

"I had been warned several months ago that the air of the country, and especially the sea wind, was having an injurious effect on His Excellency's health: I had been informed of certain outbreaks of violence, but allowance had to be made for a naturally violent and headstrong character, which had never been distinguished for self-control.

"Certain events which have taken place in Gorizia in the last few days are of such a nature that there are good grounds for apprehending that they cannot be ascribed to a sudden and passing mental disturbance. The dignity of the Government, and the authority necessary for dealing with the situation, have been seriously compromised.

"Confined to my bed for more than a month by a serious indisposition, and only possessing enough strength and concentration to cope with a mass of business which circumstances have rendered even more pressing than ever, I have not been able to go to Gorizia, as I should certainly have done at once if I had been warned of the gravity of the symptoms which have been reported to me in the last two days.

"However I shall sacrifice my health to my duty and visit Gorizia to-morrow. I shall observe the state of affairs with my own eyes and, in accordance with the provisional authorization given to me by the Prince Viceroy, I shall induce the Duke to return to France, or I shall take measures to safeguard the dignity of the Government and His Majesty's interests. . . .

"I am your Excellency's most humble and obedient servant.

"CHABROL.
"Count of the Empire, Inspector-General."

But the days went by and the situation became even more outrageous.

At last, on July 7th, Junot was really raving, with one fixed idea; – peace, – peace at any price. This obsession was an echo of the talk that could be heard everywhere throughout the Empire. Everyone longed for peace, no further effort was possible. It was true that Junot was mad, but in spite of this excuse, such groans of weariness from his oldest comrade-in-arms were bitter hearing for the Emperor.

Junot wrote three letters, one to Prince Eugène, another to the Emperor, and a third to the English Admiral who

was cruising in the Adriatic. It was this last letter that unloosed his Master's anger.

Here is the first of these three letters:

'TO HIS IMPERIAL HIGHNESS THE PRINCE VICEROY.

'SPREZIANO. *July 7th*, 1813.

'MY LORD,

'I have had the honour to be, with the deepest respect, your Imperial Highness' most obedient humble servant during the last sixteen years, as much at Palmaron where I acted as your doctor, as at San Stefano where we commanded the artillery and where your Imperial Highness, in my company, for the first time took sword in hand. You were very young then and now you are a great general and may allow us to share in your glory. . . .

'I think of nothing but peace, and I have a vast scheme which I am sure will commend itself to all the Sovereigns in the world of whom the Great Napoleon will be the chief. By my own private authority I create you King from the Adige to Cataro. I give you all the Turkish possessions in Bosnia, in . . . in . . . as far as the Bosphorus in Thrace. I give you an island in the Adriatic, one in the Black Sea, one in the Red Sea, one in the Mediterranean, one in the Pacific Ocean, and one off India.

'Sixteen shares in the gold, silver and diamond mines of the world will be distributed as follows:

'Four to His Majesty the Emperor Napoleon: to His Imperial Highness the Viceroy whom I create Emperor, or as Napoleon shall decide, two shares: to the Prince of Neufchâtel, whom I create Emperor of Austria, one and a half shares: to the Kings of the Germanic Confederation, to the Emperor of Austria whom Napoleon, if he so pleases,

will create Emperor of Spain, to the King of Naples, to the King of Holland, to the King of Westphalia, and to all the Kings whom Napoleon may subsequently create, four shares: to the English a half share; and to me a half share for governing Brazil, Portugal and half of South America; the other half, together with the South Sea Islands, the Indies and China to go to the English, if the Emperor pleases.

'We will take possession of the world and have ourselves crowned in Pekin in the presence of ten million soldiers, all our friends; and in ten years the whole plan can be carried out. I will explain the details when I see you.'

Junot then proceeded to write to the English Admiral cruising off Venice.

'Let us finish the war and suspend all hostilities. We shall both then have the honour of having given peace to the world under the auspices of the Emperor and His Majesty the Regent of Great Britain. Come and meet me here at 7 o'clock. I have a plan that will astonish you.'

All we have of the letter to the Emperor is Laura's transcription in the Memoirs. She has, she says, pruned it of its incoherencies.

'I who love you as the savage worships the sun, I will have no more to do with the war that you bid us carry on for you; I can endure it no longer.'

Then begins an exchange of letters between the Emperor, who is still at Dresden, and Prince Eugène. From this it is clear that the Emperor himself decided, without any assistance from his Police Minister Rovigo, that Junot

should be sent to his family at Montbard, and that Laura should go to meet him.

Laura states positively in the Memoirs that it was Rovigo, and Rovigo alone, who suggested this cruel decision to the Emperor, since no proper medical attendance was available at Montbard. This statement will not bear examination. The Emperor in fact received Eugène's letter on July 6th. Napoleon's answer crossed another letter of Eugène's dated July 8th. It was hardly possible to have asked the advice of Rovigo, who had stayed in Paris, and moreover, Napoleon nearly always settled matters of this kind personally.

This time, however, Napoleon and the Prince Viceroy arrived at the same decision independently.

Here is Eugène de Beauharnais's letter:

'VENICE. *July 8th*, 1813.

'I shall take upon myself to send him, attended by a reliable officer, to his family so that he can be properly treated and I shall inform the Duc de Feltre (War Minister). I have the honour to be, Sire, Your Majesty's respectful and affectionate son and faithful subject.'

Napoleon was growing impatient.

'DRESDEN. *July 8th*, 1813.

'My son, I am surprised that after all the Duc d'Abrantès has done, you have not sent him back to France. I find it difficult to express my dissatisfaction that you did not put an end to an exhibition so shocking to the feelings of all our people abroad. Send him away at once; he must not go to Paris where he is too well known, he must be taken to his father's house near Dijon. Write to the Minister of War that his wife is to meet him and take charge of him.

'N.'

'His father's house near Dijon . . .' in dictating these words Napoleon must have turned his thoughts to old Junot. 'A timber merchant in a small way,' who sweated blood to send a few pence to his son. It was the arrival of these treasure-ships from Burgundy that the general and his aide-de-camp awaited at the beginning of each month to stop up the most awkward holes. But it had been a good investment for the family: the uncle, an abbé, had been made a bishop; the father was appointed Conservator of Woods and Forests: the son-in-law was authorized to succeed to his father's post; the brother was appointed Receiver-General of taxes, etc.

Finally the Prince Viceroy wrote two letters on the same day. The entire Junot affair had exasperated the obedient Eugène, owing to the Emperor's ill-humour.

'*July* 11*th, forenoon.*

'I saw the Duc d'Abrantès yesterday at Trieste, and I satisfied myself that he is out of his mind. I arranged for two officers and two orderlies to conduct him back to his family with all possible care, and I have provided the necessary funds, for he was entirely without resources.'

'*July* 11*th, evening.*

'The Duc d'Abrantès has left for France. He is accompanied by two officers and two orderlies. I have given orders that he is to be placed in charge of his family in Burgundy and I have written to the Duc de Feltre to the effect that, in accordance with Your Majesty's orders, his wife is to meet him.'

The two officers detailed to accompany Junot were his nephew, a certain Charles Maldan, who acted, upon occa-

sion, as his secretary. The other was Lieutenant Poiré. His orders were to hand the Duc d'Abrantès over to his family in Burgundy, and the Gendarmerie of the Empire were picked men who obeyed their orders to the letter. Lieutenant Poiré had been ordered to proceed to Burgundy, and there he would go, there and nowhere else. It was this blind obedience that caused Junot's death.

The Duc d'Abrantès preserved the strictest incognito during his journey. The postillions themselves were in ignorance of the traveller's rank.

Chapter XI

THE next two months were the most troublous in Laura's whole life. She affects in her Memoirs to record with meticulous precision the events that were to jar and shatter 'the machine.' But this apparent exactitude hides an uninterrupted sequence of misrepresentations. Her dates are, for the most part, false, and the real motives are disguised.

We shall try and throw a little light on the darkness by taking step by step, or rather line by line, the story of her life during the months of July and August of 1813. As we proceed, we shall compare certain passages in the Memoirs with the texts and dates of other letters, which are the only authentic evidence. But why did Laura raise such an edifice of prevarication? The explanation may perhaps be found in a letter addressed to King Joseph.

At that time (1831) Laura's affairs were in a precarious state and in order to renew relations with the Bonaparte connection, with whom she had been on bad terms for thirty years, she needed a scapegoat: and she quite naturally chose Rovigo. Laura, who was thus relieved of the necessity of providing explanations that might have been awkward, could sing Hosanna at her ease to the glory of a God whom she had so often denied.

"I only learnt a long while afterwards that Rovigo and not the Emperor was responsible for my exile. I have a passion in my soul, in my very blood, for everything remaining in the world to-day that bears the name of Napoleon. My affection for it almost amounts to worship." (Charavay Collection.)

Laura relates, in her Memoirs, the brutal manner in which she was apprised of Junot's condition. In spite of her vehement assurances, we know from the dates of her letters that she was aware of what had happened to Junot in Illyria even before the Emperor had been informed of it.

The first letter in which Prince Eugène writes of Junot's state of health is dated June 30th, as we have already seen, and it is on this very day that Laura wrote to Maurice to tell him about Junot's 'attacks.'

The following scene, described in the Memoirs, took place apparently on July 16th.

'I was in my room one day, lying on the sofa and half asleep, after a night of suffering and wakefulness, when I recognized the voice of my brother who was talking in loud tones in the adjoining room: and the other speaker sounded like the Duc de Rovigo. Then the door opened abruptly and the Duke forced his way into the room, though my brother tried to hold him back.

' "Monsieur le Duc," said Albert in a voice trembling with anger, "I say once more that I protest most strongly against what you are about to do. It is disgraceful! My sister is ill and cannot receive you at the moment."

' "I come on behalf of the Emperor," replied the Duke, "and all doors must open to his name!"

' Albert gave way to the Emperor's name and ceased to resist his entrance; and the Duc de Rovigo came in. As he was preparing to address me, Albert anticipated him: he came up to me and taking my hands with that fatherly expression that I knew so well, he said in a voice that betrayed his deep emotion:

' "Laura, my dear sister, listen to me. Be calm. M. le Duc

brings bad news: Junot has been attacked by a serious disease."

'I was struck to the heart. I heaved a stifled groan and could not utter a word. But my whole soul, in all its distress, must have been visible in my eyes, for Albert *understood me and said, pressing me in his arms*, "No, on my honour, it is nothing more than the illness that attacked him one day an hour after he had dined.[1] My dear sister, my beloved child, calm yourself and be good to Junot for the sake of your children, and of the one not yet born."

'But I was not listening. All I grasped was the fact of this terrible disease, from which the veil that had concealed it hitherto had now been torn away. And this, without the slightest warning or indication. Alas! only four days before had I received an eight-page letter from Junot, so kind, so affectionate, so full of good sense! I could not weep. I felt choked. And the sudden movements of the child within me showed me how dreadfully agitated I was. At last I was able to speak and looking at the Duc de Rovigo, who was walking up and down in silence, I could only utter these few words:

' "Ah! M. le Duc, you have not much pity."

' "So you also," said he, sharply and in a tone that was positively brutal at such a moment, "you also are going to make a scene? What on earth can I do? I am under the Emperor's orders. In any case, if you had been willing to read what he has written instead of wasting time, we should have finished the business."

'And he threw on to my knees a letter addressed to me, enclosing another.[2] It was the letter that Junot, in the first

[1] Doubtless the famous dinner to the Deputy-Governor, June 25th.

[2] The letter to the Emperor in which Junot demands peace at any price.

THE EMPEROR NAPOLEON I

From an engraving after his portrait by David

access of madness, had sent to him by special courier, and which Napoleon had sent on to me!

' "Madame Junot, you see what your husband has written to me. I was greatly distressed when I read it. It will give you a clear idea of his condition and you must at once take steps to have him placed in proper care. You must start without losing a moment: according to what I hear from the Viceroy, Junot must have nearly reached France."

'I let the Emperor's letter fall and looked at my brother and the Duc de Rovigo, quite stupefied. At that moment I was myself deprived of the use of my reason. Albert was in despair at the misfortune that had overtaken his family, and was in the most terrible apprehension for my sake, for in my condition at the time, such news might well be my death warrant. There was no question – I say this once and for all – *of an exaggerated display of feeling, or the parade of an affection stronger and deeper than could be expected after our thirteen years of married life.* But he had always been kind to me and mine, and he was the father of my four children. He was my best and truest friend. Cursed be the man or woman who could *profane by a single word the solemn dignity of my profound sorrow at this dreadful news.* Cursed, indeed, be that impious heart who could fail to recognize my sincere and awful grief.'

Finally, after a violent tirade, Rovigo told Laura that the Emperor's orders were that Junot was not to be brought to Paris, or anywhere in the neighbourhood.

'It is the Emperor's express wish,' added the Duke in peremptory tones.

Laura at last succeeded in effecting a compromise with Rovigo in regard to the order that Junot was to be taken to Montbard: and it was agreed on both sides that the Duc

d'Abrantès should go to Geneva where he could conveniently be treated. But no one knew the route that the Viceroy had laid down for the Duke's journey. However, Laura was to set out in her travelling carriage for Geneva, on the following day, to wait for Junot if he should come by the Simplon. Savary, on his part, 'wrote by telegraph,' as they used to say at that time, to the Prefect of Lyons, to send out in the direction of Geneva in case he came by the Mont-Cenis.

Laura states that she left Paris on July 17th at eleven o'clock in the evening, accompanied by her brother and Madame Thomière, the excellent Agatha. She adds:

'Oh! what shattering memories! And yet one would like to immortalize them. One becomes identified with them and one's mind develops a kind of affection for them. But I am not writing the story of my life in these Memoirs: I must pass over these details, and only dwell upon all this when I must do so, in order not to spoil the composition of the picture.'

Laura dismisses her journey in a few words:

'I travelled through to Geneva without stopping, and I reached Sécheron, where I stayed at dear Déjean's house, on the 21st at 10 a.m. . . .'

Once again Laura is concealing the truth. She must have gone on ahead, leaving, no doubt, Agatha Thomière and her brother to catch her up, perhaps at Montbard, where she admits having passed a day. Laura insisted on a last meeting with Maurice. The interview took place at Melun. The place was well chosen, for Maurice had a property in the neighbourhood and could leave Mortefontaine on this pretext. Besides he was toying with plans for another journey.

"I am leaving for Melun where I will wait for you. I am ruined irretrievably if you breathe a word of this to anyone at all – understand me – without any exception whatever, for if any rumours reach my house within forty-eight hours, I am lost, I repeat, lost irretrievably. Everything is over for me. My hopes are destroyed. I have been misled by illusions. I doubt if I shall even have the wherewithal to live for the remainder of my days. All that I believed in, the support for which I looked at the close of my life, all has vanished into smoke. Come and say a last good-bye to me. I shall wait for you. I shall be at the inn in the market-square, but I repeat you must say nothing of all this, absolutely nothing. Good-bye; I have more courage than I thought, perhaps, but I need it all."

Maurice doubtless gave Laura the benefit of his 'kindest and most affectionate friendship.'[1] They certainly left Melun in company, and then went their several ways. Maurice took the opportunity of paying a visit to Vichy where his bevy of women were awaiting him: Queen Julie, Madame de Flotte, Madame Regnault de St. Jean d'Angely, and his new passion, Zoë-Victoire du Cayla.

Laura informs us of all this in a short note written three months later:

[1] Three years later Laura wrote to Maurice who had again become Marquis de Balincourt, when he was in command of a squadron of the Royal Guard at Melun:

"Do you remember what happened there, in that very place (perhaps in that very room), when your dear voice brought me back to love and reason as well. I could listen to nothing! Then you came in and said a single word, and your beloved felt at once all the charms of the deepest love and the kindness of the most affectionate friendship."

"By the way, you may know that Madame Regnault tells everybody here that *it was you* who saw the Pr . . . at V . . . (Vichy), and said to that woman, that you came with me as far as . . . If one is to believe her, she shared your confidence to some extent. I don't believe any of this, but I repeat it to you, Maurice, so as to show you that this society is beneath you, and to insist that you do not set foot in it again. The sacrifice is not great, and believe me I have strong reasons for my insistance.

"Good-bye, my dear.

"Maurice, you said I was not straightforward when I spoke to you about Madame Regnault, and yet it is the absolute truth, and I did not say all I might have done. What I did not say eats away my very heart, like a corroding worm, and deprives me of nearly all my rest. You know that she is much involved with Madame Hamelin, whom my brother-in-law visits very often: that is how it all reached me. You see I am *perfectly straightforward* and I do not conceal from you how I came to hear of it. She pretends to have seen a great deal of that woman and the Princess: both of them, she says, are your friends and on better terms with you than ever. If that is so, they must think you do not love me, for their hatred is too active to have died down, especially at this time. All these reflections, Maurice, plunge me in despair."

At last Laura, accompanied by her bodyguard, the excellent Albert and Agatha, reached Geneva on the 20th, not the 21st, at 10 a.m. as she describes in her Memoirs.

"*This 20th July.*

"I arrived an hour ago, in the most pitiable state: I have gone to bed, and I feel so ill, my heart is so weak and shat-

tered that I have no hope of consolation; I am almost tempted to pray to God that I may not recover.

"And yet my confidence in you is unshaken. Do not betray it, for a love like mine could only find in death a consolation for the destruction of its hopes. I have none except in you, and I am sure they are secure. Maurice, think of all this, think of our love, of the memories in your kind and loyal heart, and I shall have nothing to fear from that woman whose rights can hardly be considered against mine.

"Good-bye, my dear, Dr. Butini[1] says that I have a fever, and ought not to write. I must leave you, but you are my only friend, my only lover. Good-bye: I press you to my heart, that lives only for you.

"*No one* has come yet."

In the following letter, written two days later, she refers again to Junot, who made so brief an appearance at the end of the preceding letter.

"*This 23rd July.*

"We have been apart now for a week and I have not yet received a single line from you to say that you were sharing my grief, and that you too are unhappy. Ah! Maurice, you know my heart: you know it is sensitive and easily wounded. Why not avoid it [*sic*] one more grief which it is hardly in a state to bear. I wanted to bring a rose-tree with me and have it planted by the lake where we had that jumping competition, and where Madame D . . . (Doumerc) and I were sitting in that sedan-chair when you came to ask for your prize. I wanted to consecrate the place but I could not carry out my plan. I have a fever and can scarcely stand, though I must set out again to-morrow. Just imagine that by a

[1] A famous Geneva doctor of the period.

most unfortunate misunderstanding *he* passed through Lyons and was not sent on here. So *he* is at home, and as *he* is too ill to travel the further hundred miles to this place, I am to join him. *He* is very bad indeed: there was a scene at Chambéry just like the one that took place in Trieste. I don't know what will become of me. The advice of the doctors, their orders, in fact, agreed with those of the Paris doctors: they will not consent to his seeing me. He is so violent that they say my life might really be in danger. However, I much hope to bring him somewhere in the neighbourhood of Paris. As far as I am concerned I shall return, in any case, by August 15th at the latest.

"Do not address your letters here. Write to me at Dijon, Poste Restante at Blanche's address.

"Good-bye, my dear, good-bye, my only love. Good-bye, all my happiness in this world. How I do love you! How I suffer since I left you! My love for you seems to have grown deeper, if that were possible: but indeed I cannot love you more than I have always done since I became yours: for, since then, my love for you has been my whole life. Good-bye: I am sad and unhappy because I have nothing with me to remind me of you. But surely your beloved will receive from you this evening an assurance that you always love her."

As a matter of fact, Lieutenant Poiré, who accompanied the Duc d'Abrantès, had express orders to hand Junot over to his father. He paid no attention to the Prefect of Lyons, M. de Bondy, an ordinary civilian; he pursued his journey to Montbard and then handed the Duke over to his family. Laura, who was too ill to travel, had sent her brother Albert on ahead, to announce the fact.

It was at this period, in all probability, that Laura's 'accident' occurred.

'I suddenly felt within me a movement that warned me of a fresh catastrophe. It was my child's last sigh. Poor flower that had fallen before it had been born: I closed my eyes and fell back upon my bed in a condition which I hoped might be serious enough to put an end to so stormy a life as mine. What I suffered is not to be told. As I am not writing the story of my own life I will merely say that I owe my life to M. Butini. And I was only twenty-seven.' (Laura subtracts two years from her age.)

"GENEVA. *July 26th.*

"I have been very ill, Maurice, and I am far from being out of danger, but your letter did me so much good. It brought me back to life: this morning, when it was handed to me, I had just gone through the most dreadful crisis, but my sufferings were forgotten and for a few moments all was joy and happiness. Oh! Maurice, Maurice, was this fatal separation necessary to give me one more proof that without you I cannot live, that without you life would be odious to me? Alas! I see too clearly that even my slightest sensations are coloured by my love for you. When I reached here, in a state of misery, thinking only of the moment when I might again clasp you in my arms, I saw nothing: Nature was dead to me; Nature, so lovely and so enchanting, was veiled from my eyes. The only thought that distracted my mind as I lay exhausted on my bed of pain, shedding tears of despair and terrified lest I had sacrificed my child by this wretched journey, and perhaps by my abandoned grief of the last few days, with no word from you, feverish and tormented, my only thought, I say, was that I should neither

hear from you nor see you. And then your letter came, this morning. How transcendent is the power of an all-absorbing love: my troubles are not at an end, but they at once grew less the moment I read your letter, when I saw before my eyes a fresh assurance of your love, or, more truly, of my life. The sweetest balm seemed to fall upon my heart and spread throughout my being. I laughed and wept, and when I came to the end of your letter where you said that 'my place would always be against your heart, that there I have a refuge as long as I want it,' I burst into tears and I told Agatha how happy I was. You must try and like the dear creature a little, Maurice, for the answer that she gave me. 'I was much distressed this winter when I saw you form this liaison. I did not know him and I noticed that you were continually unhappy on his account. But now that I have been able to appreciate him, and see that he returns your feelings for him, I regard this connection as extremely fortunate and one of your most precious and delightful consolations for your many troubles.' That is what Agatha said to me, my dear, and on reading your letter again I feel she was right and that you alone can console me now and bring me happiness.

"As I lay in bed just now, I was looking at the lake, at Mont Blanc, at the magnificent foliage, at all the varied beauties of Nature, and I thought how lovely it would be to admire them all in the company of the friend of my heart. And my imagination at once brought before me the most enchanting dream. Maurice, listen to me. My brother is no longer here: he is at Montbard with *him*: further orders will be necessary now that his escort were so stupid as not to bring him here; and they cannot arrive for at least a fortnight. Until then I shall be alone with Agatha, lying in

bed, or walking gently down to the shore of the lake. Why could you not ask for a week's leave to go to Lyons on business? That would give you the time to come and see me, and return. If at the moment you have not the necessary money, let me be your banker. Just write to me and I promise that thirty-six hours after I receive your letter, you will find in the hands of M. Delphin, banker at Lyons, a bill of exchange in your name for fifty or a hundred louis, which I promise to ask you for next winter. So you need only regard it as a loan. Oh! Maurice! if only this might come true, how delightful it would be! And why not? You are not on duty and nothing is more simple than to have some business at Lyons. Besides, Maurice, unless that woman is keeping you back (which I don't believe), even if the truth were suspected, far from blaming you they would praise you for going to console a sick and unhappy friend: you must remember that my position is exceptional.

"You ask me for details. I cannot give you any at the moment. I expect a letter to-morrow from my brother which should make matters more clear. All I know is that he has a few lucid moments in the intervals of his attacks, but that they are very short, and a further seizure is feared. But to understand all this it is necessary to see him and the doctors [passage missing] . . . of the same opinion as myself. If that were the decision of the doctors in Paris and of those here, it would entirely alter my future life. Since I cannot see him I shall instal him somewhere near Paris, in a country house which I shall buy, and I shall be able to live in the company of my children and my friends.

"Good-bye, Maurice, I have written a long letter, and I am being scolded for it because I am weak and ought not to tire myself. But I am so happy to be with you. Sorrow

seems very far off then. Good-bye once more, my dear. I clasp you to my heart and would keep you there forever. Good-bye, my only, my dearest friend. Love me always, and then I cannot come to any harm."

We must now return to the account in the Memoirs of Junot's arrival at Montbard.

'Albert left and arrived at Montbard in the night. Alas, my forebodings had been only too true and my poor friend's arrival at his father's house had been the occasion of the most dreadful scenes, and everything was in utter confusion. Junot's father, who was of a naturally gloomy disposition, had received such a shock at his son's terrible appearance that he was completely helpless. His two sisters, equally terrified, could do nothing but groan and weep: at least the youngest one. While the son, young Charles Maldan, behaved exactly as he had done at Lyons, where his feebleness had such fatal results. The whole house was in confusion. Junot owed everything to the kindness of the inhabitants of Montbard, whose noble and generous conduct was beyond all praise. Four of them sat with the sick man and watched over him like brothers. My gratitude will bless them to the end of my days. . . .

'Junot recognized his brother-in-law, to whom he was deeply attached, and at once began to talk to him about me and about the Emperor: the two strongest passions of his life, both were with him still, though Death had already laid its hand on that poor heart.

'There are some events that one dare not recall, however brave one may be. I cannot speak of the *terrible scenes* which took place at Montbard, immediately after Junot's arrival. When Albert got there the harm was done: no treatment

could have been of any use. None the less he thought it well to *send a courier to Paris* to look for M. Junot, my brother-in-law, Receiver-General of Taxes in the Department of the Haute Saône, telling him to bring Dubois with him. For the seventeen doctors or surgeons who had taken up the case so busily were not of the slightest use.[1] Albert did everything he could for his brother-in-law: he sat by his bedside, and did not leave him until these deplorable scenes came to an end.'

In a Thesis offered to the Faculty of Medicine in Paris entitled 'Diagnosis of Junot's mental state,' the Author says:

'It is regrettable that we have no exact information as to the "terrible scenes" which followed Junot's arrival. We only know that Junot's excitement was such that after breaking his leg he still walked on it, revealing in this way an anæsthesia to which we shall have occasion to return.' The Author, taking refuge in hypotheses, says further on: '. . . an attack of delirium in the course of which the sick man fled before some terrifying hallucination and fell from the window. . . .'

In the following letter Laura relates these famous scenes in detail and definitely clears up a historical point which has hitherto been obscure.

"Maurice, I am in despair: no doubt you know what a dreadful thing has happened to my poor husband. And I

[1] 'Now, after so long a time, I can pardon the conduct of the family who were stupid enough to allow their Head, whom from the merest self-respect they were bound to look after, behave as he did in the delirium of the most acute brain fever. But I can never forget it: my heart forbids me. I shudder when I think of it.' (Laura's note.)

cannot get to him. I am tied here by an imperious necessity and I cannot go and look after him. I toss from side to side in my bed of pain, which I cannot leave, and my distress of mind adds to the sufferings of my body, already exhausted by a persistent fever. When I got this dreadful news, I wanted to leave, but alas! I could not. Agatha threw herself in front of me and M. Butini declared that I might as well shoot myself as I went out of the door. If it had been merely a question of risking my own life nothing could have stopped me hastening where my heart and my duty called me, but my duty as a mother was to preserve my child's life,[1] and so I stayed. Besides the unhappy man would not recognize me. His father, his sisters, my brother, whom he likes, are all with him, but he cannot tell them apart and does nothing but ramble on without sense or meaning. I think my heart would break if, when I saw him, his wandering gaze did not know it was I, – I whom he was calling for, and whom he wanted so much to see. During the last nine days since I heard the news I have myself been quite out of my mind. When I think of it all, I positively shudder with horror. If I can, I will give you a few details that I am sure you do not know.

"On the 22nd, at 3 o'clock in the morning, he arrived at his father's house. He recognized him at first, and his sister as well, but after a few moments he said to his father: 'Did you know I was a bird and can fly about as I like?' He had scarcely spoken the last word when he jumped through a window which was open on account of the great heat, and was only about two or three feet above the level of the ground. He ran quickly to the end of the garden, climbed the wall, and leapt on to the high road. The poor soul broke

[1] We know from her letters that the child was already dead.

his left leg above the ankle. They all rushed to his assistance. A surgeon was summoned and fixed some preliminary dressings, but in a fresh frenzy he tore off the bandages and made the wound much worse. Surgeons from Dijon, Tonnerre and Châtillon soon arrived and succeeded in attending to the injury. Since I heard of all this I have been quite beside myself. This dreadful picture is before my eyes day and night,[1] and leaves me not an instant's peace: it is engraved upon my heart for the rest of my life. I shall always see that garden, and that wall – and I shall always have the misery of thinking that if the orders given at Lyons had been carried out and he had been brought here, all this would not have happened. I may have to suffer misfortunes, crushing ones perhaps, but nothing can be compared with what I have had to endure the last six weeks. My enemies must be delighted, for the object of their hatred is indeed to be pitied. There are not a few of them in your company, Maurice. Tell them what I am going through and let them be satisfied.

"My dear, in all my misery of the last three days my only consolation is that you will share my sorrow when you hear of it. Tell me that you do. Tell me that you are sorry for your unhappy friend.

"Good-bye: think of your unhappy friend: and write to her often. Remember that a letter from you is a solace to her suffering heart. Good-bye once more, and pray that Heaven has no further suffering in store for me."

[1] Laura alleges that Junot appeared to her one night at Geneva, walking on his broken leg.

Chapter XII

JUNOT died on July 29th at four o'clock in the afternoon, 'from self-inflicted injuries' says Napoleon, after having tried, so it is stated, to cut off his broken leg with a pair of scissors. Whether that was true or not, Junot had a complicated double fracture of the lower part of the left leg: and very likely he aggravated the injury in his delirium. He died seven days after breaking his leg. The possibility of gangrene and even of tetanus suggests itself. He died, therefore, of septicæmia resulting from his injury and not from general paralysis itself. If he had been more carefully looked after he might have lived several years more, though a purely passive existence, it is true. None the less, so long as he was alive, though shorn of his humanity, his condition of half-survival would have constituted some claim upon the Emperor and the position of his family would have been greatly improved.

"*August 4th.*

"You are very right to be sorry for me, for I am greatly to be pitied. The fatal news came like a thunder-clap. My poor brother tried in vain to prepare me for it, but how can one be prepared for a misfortune of this sort? My loss is immense and irreparable. I have lost the friend of my youth, my life's companion, and the father of my children, and he himself loved me as much as, indeed more than, his own life. My heart is desolate and I am in the depths of misery. I am in despair at the thought that he did not see me before the fatal moment. Alas! it seems from all that I have heard, that he would not have recognized me, me, his beloved Laura whom he called for so constantly. Now I have

only one hope of consolation in this world and that is to see my children and yourself once more. I think of you together because you and they are what I love best in the world. I tell you all my sorrows because your heart is worthy of my confidence and deserves to share my grief. *Your letter from Montbard*,[1] and the touching concern that you showed to my brother, have woven fresh bonds between us, if that is possible, and have redoubled my respect and my regard for you.

"Since I heard the awful news, four hours ago, my health, which had improved a little, has given way again. The fever has come back. . . . I shall not be able to start before the 10th or 12th of this month, but I shall certainly be able to go by then. I shall take the long route through Burgundy and Lyons: nothing will induce me to come within a hundred miles of that fatal house. A spring mattress has been made for me which will protect me against the jolting of the carriage.

"Good-bye, Maurice, my friend, and now my only friend. If you could go and see my children it would make me very happy.

"Good-bye, we shall meet again soon.

"Write to me, Poste Restante, Lyons."

"GENEVA. *August 8th.*

"Your letter neither astonished nor distressed me. I merely saw in what you tell me one more proof of the malice and wickedness of the world: but my conscience is too clear and my conduct too far above reproach, for this kind of thing to make much impression upon me. People who can

[1] Albert de Permon had no doubt told Maurice the news, and he went to Montbard with Dr. Dubois.

speak against me in so sacred and solemn a situation as mine are so contemptible in my eyes that I hardly understand what they say. My friends, my true friends, are not of this way of thinking, and that is all I ask and all I need. They alone can bring me some relief from the pain I am suffering – by their affection for me. And it is especially in the permanence of this affection that I hope to-day to find my consolation.

"Your letter was just what was needed to bring me the sweetest and most precious consolations, my dear. It was kind, gentle and affectionate, and as I read it I felt that I could still be happy. But I could only be happy with you, Maurice, you and my children, you and they are my entire Universe to-day. Your affection and your love can enliven it with a thousand charms. Besides the deep affection that I have felt for you for a year past there are now the feelings of duty and regard that I had for the unhappy man who is no more. The *bonds* which attach me to you are no less sacred than those which united me to him and you are everything to me until death parts us.

"I am still very weak: I get better very slowly. My health, which had been weakened by a long and serious illness, has received so painful a shock that I do not think that I can start before the 20th of this month. There is no need for me to do as you suggest and deliberately postpone my departure so as to keep those evil people quiet. I am unfortunately quite unable to start at this moment. I feel it myself only too surely, and though I am surrounded by the most kind and friendly care that often quite goes to my heart, yet I am conscious of being deprived of the most precious of all consolations. I have not seen my dear children again. I have not yet heard their dear voices telling me to live for

their sake, and I have not been able to rest my head upon your breast, Maurice. Nor have I heard your beloved voice calling me back to life and saying that you need me too. Oh! my dear, when I see you, when I look into your eyes, then for the first time since my sorrow I shall know an instant's happiness. Good-bye, I press you to my heart.

"Write still to Poste Restante, Lyons."

Let us leave Laura to recover from her successive shocks in Switzerland, classic haunt of convalescents, and let us cast an eye on what had been going on for the last month at Dresden, during the armistice. We shall see how the unfortunate incident at Mortefontaine, that truly sorry affair, had finally influenced the march of events, while the destinies of the world were at issue.

When the Emperor heard of Junot's madness, he appointed Fouché to succeed him. Fouché was then at Dresden, whither the Emperor had summoned him to ask his advice, and not in Italy, as Laura states: Napoleon wanted to kill two birds with one stone. He made the appointment to get rid of a persistent intriguer, who was no further use to him, and because Fouché was what he was. Illyria, in these uncertain times, needed a man of resource for a Governor, and one who could keep an eye on the obscure unrest that had begun to be observable in Italy.

The following information has been extracted from the 'Notebooks' of General Anthouard, who had, for the time being, taken Junot's place at Trieste.

The two men were on the best of terms.

'Fouché,' says General Anthouard, 'in the course of our long and private interview, delivered a long oration on secret police work, and related how Savary had come to

grief. . . . He told me how annoyed Talleyrand was at not being summoned to Dresden, and favoured me with a long disquisition upon Maret, Duc de Bassano (Talleyrand's successor), an excellent Minister and Secretary of State, but quite useless as Foreign Minister: he practically said that Maret was too honest a man for this important post. He explained to me how it was, in fact, Maret's fault that the Emperor's negotiations at Dresden had come to nothing.'

Fouché declared to Napoleon that since Austria had proposed herself as arbitrator, Metternich must be bought, a very simple matter: all that was needed was, say, two millions' worth of jewels for his wife, and a million in ready money for himself. The Emperor could subsequently be 'more or less generous,' in accordance with the turn of events.

'Agreed,' said Napoleon: 'take the matter up with Maret.'

Fouché and Maret did what was necessary. When Metternich arrived, Fouché went to meet him and skilfully sounded him. He opened the conversation by renewing acquaintance with the Prince, since his departure from Paris – possibly they talked about the fair friends that Metternich had left in France – in any case, passing from one subject to another, the bargain was, by implication, concluded.

Fouché, rubbing his hands, brought Metternich to see Maret; and there the whole scheme went aground.

Metternich went in alone. Fouché was very nervous. He was sure that if his friend Talleyrand had been there, matters would have been settled very promptly, but he had not the same opinion of Maret; he waited . . . at last Metternich came out and Fouché rushed in to the Duc de Bassano.

'Well, what did he say to the jewels and the present?'

'But I had no opportunity of making the offer.'

'Good God, then all is lost!'

'It is not at all easy to make a suggestion of the kind to a man of his rank.'

'Nonsense, man: you would give twenty-five louis to a servant: you need not have any hesitation in offering a Prince fifteen hundred thousand francs' worth of jewels for his lady and a million for himself to go on with. You have ruined everything. He will think he has been made a fool of, and he will find others who will not haggle: he will transfer his support to them and we are lost.'

It was, in fact, the case that, on his second appearance at Dresden, Metternich was obdurate. Hence the Emperor's remark to the Chancellor, a remark which made Laura d'Abrantès so furious in her Memoirs.

'How much do you receive from England, Monsieur de Metternich, to declare war on me?'

The Emperor appointed Fouché to Illyria on July 17th and said to him:

'Take advantage of the truce, ask Metternich for a permit to go through Bohemia.'

Metternich, adds d'Anthouard, gave it him as being an old acquaintance, – and when Napoleon later on sent Fouché to the Murats to beg them not to be guilty of the ultimate disloyalty, it was too late. Fouché, too, had made '*his treaty with Metternich*' – and the Murats were completely under his control. Without the pretext for crossing Bohemia to get to Illyria, the 'treaty' between the two confederates might not have been so firmly established, and the pretext was provided by the succession to the unhappy Junot's appointment.

On July 22nd the Emperor placed Junot on the retired list.

At the beginning of August, Napoleon had heard about the terrible scenes of Montbard, but nothing further. Savary, who had taken charge of the Duc d'Abrantès, suggested putting his affairs and perhaps his papers into some sort of order. The following is the reply dictated by Napoleon.

'I have received your letter of August 2nd. I am truly distressed at what you tell me about poor Junot. He had forfeited my good opinion during the last campaign, but I had not ceased to be much attached to him. Now that I know that his *want of courage* was due to his disease, I revise my opinion of his conduct. I approve of all your suggestions. You had better see the Chancellor-General: I am writing to him. The two girls can be sent to Ecouen. You do not tell me the age of the two children.'

It was from a despatch sent by Albert de Permon from Montbard that Napoleon learnt that all was over.

'The Emperor was then at Dresden and the armistice was still in force,' writes Laura. 'He was living in the Marcolini palace,[1] and when the despatch was handed to him, he was in the office of the secretary then on duty, a M. Prevost, auditor to the Council of State. The room is on the ground floor, looking on to the garden with rather a low ceiling, like the Emperor's office at the Elysée Napoleon: that, as is well known, is in the wing facing the Avenue

[1] About as far from the city of Dresden as the Arc de Triomphe is from the Tuileries.

Marigny, corresponding to the silver boudoir at the other extremity of the palace. Napoleon liked this room in the Marcolini palace because it looked straight on to the palace gardens, which left him free to move about without making his way through a crowd of Chamberlains and guards.

'When Albert's despatch was handed to him he unfastened it at once, and held it in his left hand: after reading a few lines he struck himself on the forehead with his right. In doing so he dropped the despatch, abruptly picked it up again, and then cried out in a tone of anguish:

' "Junot! Junot! O my God!"

'And he crushed the despatch in his hands.

' "Junot," he said once more in accents that came from the heart, and showed genuine grief.

'But when he looked round and noticed that he was observed, he would not acknowledge his *common humanity* in public, and with a sad inscrutable smile, and in a clear, though faltering voice, he said:

' "Another of my brave companions gone. Junot! O my God!"

'He seemed, according to an eye-witness of the scene, to be deeply moved. His irregular steps as he walked up and down the room struck all who were present. He spoke in a low voice, and it became hard to make out what he was saying. But the expression of his eyes and his face showed that his words came from the heart. He remained in this state for about a quarter of an hour. Then he put aside these sincere and simple feelings, that purified his heart and gave him that potent charm of his which he lost in losing those whom he loved and who loved him. He shook his head and sighed.'

Rovigo then intervened.

It is probable that he suggested a country retreat for the Duchesse d'Abrantès. But the very name let loose the imperial wrath. Napoleon wrote as follows:

'DRESDEN. *August 7th*, 1813.

'I approve your suggestion that you settle with the Duchesse d'Abrantès some place in the country where she may henceforward live in retirement. You will tell her that having been the wife of the Governor of Paris, and having grossly misbehaved herself and mismanaged her family affairs to such an extent as to throw them into irretrievable confusion and leave her children without means of subsistence, she is to understand that this must now come to an end and nothing more must be heard of her.'

Rovigo took advantage of this partial *carte-blanche* to go beyond his orders, as indeed his habit was. He took upon himself to exile Laura 120 miles from Paris, and sent her brother-in-law Geouffre to inform her of his decision.

He had begun by instituting a kind of search at her house in the Rue des Champs-Élysées. Laura heard the two pieces of news at the same time.

'One morning – August 25th – a postchaise came into the courtyard at Sécheron. Albert looked out of his window and was astonished to see my brother-in-law, M. de Geouffre, getting out of the carriage. I saluted my brother-in-law and asked what brought him to Geneva. He was at first somewhat embarrassed for a reply because, as a matter of fact, if he had refused this stupid commission, the Duc de Rovigo would not have dared to entrust it to anyone else. He handed me a letter from the Minister in which the latter

requested me officially to hand over the private correspondence between the Emperor and Junot. Junot possessed more than a hundred and fifty letters from Napoleon written in his own hand. . . .

'"Now," added my brother-in-law, "here is another letter from the Duc de Rovigo," and he handed me a short note containing the following words only:

'"Rely on your friends to see that the present state of affairs does not go on too long. . . . Good-bye. *You may count on my sincere friendship.*"

'I looked at my brother-in-law to ask him for an explanation of this note, and after some hesitation he said:

'"The Duc de Rovigo has charged me to tell you that he has received orders from the Emperor that you are not to be allowed within a hundred and fifty miles from Paris."

'Albert leapt from his chair and rushed up to M. de Geouffre, saying in a voice of thunder:

'"*It is false!* The Emperor could never have given so infamous an order."

'I was completely prostrated. Madame Thomière came to my bedside and taking me in her arms she burst into tears.

'"I forgot to give you a letter from M. Junot, the Receiver-General," said M. de Geouffre, giving me a long letter from my brother-in-law.

'I was amazed when I had opened it. The intrigue which threatened me grew more clearly defined and assumed a sinister and terrifying aspect.

'The letter from my brother-in-law, M. Junot, who was trustee for my children, though I was their legal and natural guardian, gave me an account, with details that passed all

belief, of a most extraordinary episode that had occurred in my house in the Rue des Champs-Élysées only five days before. I quote it word for word:

'The Duc de Rovigo called at my house and *requested the presence of one of the guardians of the estate while he recovered possession of the letters*. My brother-in-law went, but called attention to the fact that as trustee merely he had no rights and would certainly exercise none against my authority: furthermore that the inheritance was not yet settled, there were numerous creditors,[1] and that everything was under seal: this should have been his only reply and he should have made it as soon as he saw the Duke. During this conversation, M. de Geouffre, my brother-in-law, who had no standing in the matter except to take part in the family council when it was called together, appeared on the scene accompanied by M. Fissont, the Duc d'Abrantès' secretary. They all said the same thing. "The seals are in place and the proper authority is not here." But the Duc de Rovigo merely laughed at this:

' "Nonsense! what has that to do with me? *I have my orders*. I want those letters and I shall take them."

'M. Junot, and also M. Fissont, then pointed out that there was a material difficulty: the impossibility of opening the safe.

' "The Duchess is now the only person who knows the key-word," said M. Junot, "since my poor brother is gone. And even if we could get some indications, the gold key which the Duke carried about with him must have been lost."

[1] I was myself the largest creditor of the estate, in respect of my dowry and jointure, and my claims took precedence.

' "I beg your pardon," said the Duc de Rovigo. "I have your brother's gold key: here it is."

'And he produced it on the spot. I found this very hard to explain. Albert had seen the gold key at Montbard, and being excessively scrupulous of the proprieties, especially in matters of business, he had not been willing to bring back the key to me. How it came into the Duc de Rovigo's possession I could not make out.

'While he was talking with the two men, he had gone through the billiard-room, the small study and the large study and finally reached the Duke's bedroom.

' "Now then," he said, drawing back the shutter of the window near the chest, "let us get to work." . . .

'The iron chest was opened and out of it were taken the Emperor's letters, and at the same time *some letters from another member of his family*. . . .

'I was in an extremely weak state. My brother's statement at first had the most dreadful effect on me. I could see the Emperor's revenge descending on me as on Madame de Staël, Madame de Chevreuse and Madame Récamier. Junot alone had been able to protect me. No sooner were his eyes closed than I felt the weight of a hand that knew how to strike. These were my reflexions, at least, when my brother gave me the extraordinary message with which he had been entrusted.

' "I am in a hurry," he said: "I cannot even stay and dine with you. I will get some luncheon and then I must go. What reply am I to give?"

' "I will compose one while you are at table," I answered: "it will not be a long one."

'I finally wrote a few lines to the Duc de Rovigo, to the effect that I counted on him to *rescue me from my exile*. I said

no more and gave my letter to my brother-in-law to whom I replied, when he begged for an answer, out of regard for me, that I should no doubt go to Roüen. He left with this verbal answer, in accordance with his instructions, only a few hours after his arrival at Sécheron.'

And when, after Geouffre's departure, Albert asked Laura what her intentions were:

'To do my duty,' she said: 'and that means going back to my children: I shall start to-morrow.'

Laura declares that she travelled practically the whole way to Versailles on her back. At Versailles she got a lodging at the house of one Rambaud: she left the town on September 17th, 1813, and reached her house in the Rue des Champs-Élysées at nine o'clock in the evening.

There all her friends were waiting for her to offer some sort of demonstration of sympathy.

'There I met with one of those displays of affection,' says Laura, 'that go straight to the heart because they prove that you deserve to be loved since your friends offer you their support at a time of trouble. I found at my house, I can truthfully say, a crowd of devoted friends who were not afraid of giving public expression of their regard for me. There were M. de Montbreton, M. Decazes, M. Alphonse Perregaux, M. de Forbin, M. de Courtomer, M. de Brigode, M. Millin, Madame la Marquise de Bréhan, her husband, M. de Cherval, my uncles, M. de Comnène, M. Suchet, Madame Mortière, Caroline, my dear Agatha, and my brother!

'As I got down from my carriage and saw myself surrounded by this friendly throng who wanted to make a little easier for me the first moments of my return to the house,

to which I was coming back in secret, for the first time since my husband's death, I could not restrain my tears. But their kindness was not misplaced. There was nothing bitter in those tears. They had saved me from the terrible shock of the first few moments.

'M. de Montbreton who had known me as a child, and whose regard for my mother had descended to me, could not contain his indignation. He expressed it freely, and so did my kind friend M. de Courtomer, and I felt I could rely upon his open-hearted friendship for help if I should need it. They all offered their services, and then, thinking I must be tired, they left me to rest by myself.'

At 10.30 another visitor – the Duc de Rovigo, who came to make the most terrible scene because Laura had defied his edict. Laura answered him as she very well understood how to do.

'Oh, indeed!' said he, looking her up and down: 'so the linnets have begun to sing, have they? The Master may be far away, but I am here, and we shall see what happens!'

Nothing at all happened. Laura had got home against wind and tide, and she meant to stay there.

But the true facts appear to have been slightly different.

Let us consider the dates. Laura makes Geouffre reach Sécheron on August 25th. Now on the 19th she was already at Lyons on her return journey, and writing to Maurice:

"LYONS. 19*th midnight.*

"In my despair, in the frenzy of my sorrow, my heart calls to one only and that is you. Only you can make me forget this new and terrible blow. I have chosen Rouen for my place of exile, and I am setting out there to-morrow. I shall travel to Nevers without stopping. On Sunday I

shall reach Montargis, and on Monday the 23rd I shall be at Versailles. I must see you or I shall die of the awful despair that has been torturing me for the last three days. But you must not leave Paris before nine in the evening: you can easily drive to Versailles in an hour and a half. I shall be staying in Madame Rambaud's house. When you arrive ask one of the servants to go and fetch Blanche. She will show you the way and prevent your being observed by anyone who might have come to see me. Then, at last, my poor heart that has been so tormented in this past month will know the touch of happiness once more. Oh, Maurice, my beloved: how the barbarous brutes have tortured me! I am sometimes seized by a frenzy of despair, when I think of the moment they have chosen, and I can hardly imagine that any human creature could be more unhappy, and yet I could know an even greater grief than these. And that, Maurice, would be your desertion. Let me say once more that I should not survive it, and yet in the letter I received from you this morning, you dare to tell me that you have been told that I no longer loved you. Ah, Maurice, take care what people tell you. I saw the unhappy Montléar at Aix. I saw his veritable despair at having been accused of saying things that never passed his lips. He is intending to go to Paris to get the treacherous and lying creature to retract her detestable falsehoods: his distress truly touched me."

Chapter XIII

LAURA had forced the barriers. She reached her house in the teeth of Rovigo, who had gone beyond his orders in exiling her a hundred and twenty miles from Paris. Once more Savary had come to grief by exceeding the Emperor's intentions. He had to beat a tolerably inglorious retreat.

Napoleon d'Abrantès relates the family tradition in his *Boudoirs de Paris*.

'She (the Duchesse de Chevreuse) was exiled a hundred miles from Paris, and her mother as well, after my father's death; no one knew why, nor were any reasons given. But my mother, at least, stood out against this stupid barbarity.

'She resisted and she was right to do so, for there was no further question of sending her into exile.

'I can no longer remember whether my mother has quoted in her memoirs the excellent remark made by the Duc de Vicence to the Emperor on this occasion. The day after my mother, notwithstanding the edict issued against her, had gone back to her house with remarkable dignity and courage, the Emperor, at his morning levée, observed to the Duc de Vicence who had been a friend of my mother from childhood:

' "Well, Monsieur le Duc, your little sister (he had called my mother so since early days) is a bold young person; what do you think?"

'At first M. de Caulaincourt would not answer, but, on being pressed to explain himself,

' "Since your Majesty," he said, "insists on my giving you my opinion, I would say that if you often act in this way,

your generals will be ashamed to leave their widows in your care.'"

Laura had gone home on August 25th and not on September 17th. The fact is indisputable. All her subsequent letters prove that only public opinion preserved her from Rovigo's persecution, for Napoleon, as cannot be too often emphasized, made immense concessions to public opinion, and Rovigo could not do otherwise.

Shortly afterwards Laura wrote Maurice the following series of letters:

"PARIS. *August 25th.*

"You have no doubt heard of my latest good fortune? You must have been very astonished. Alas! I have been so wretched that I can scarcely believe that any good can come to me. I always think, my dear, that anything of the kind is due to you. Maurice, remember what I told you the other day: it is a great happiness to love as I love you.

"I am worn out with fatigue and worry: and I have a frightful headache. I shall go to bed: I fancy I am a little feverish. When I think of you, my dear, I shall suffer less or at least I shall forget my sufferings.

"Good-bye, come back soon, and until then let me hear from you every day. Good-bye."

"*August 26th.*

"I spent a painful day yesterday. Every time our eyes rest upon an object that recalls someone whom one will never see again, it seems as if that object were conscious and capable of thought, and the tears rise to one's eyes in spite of the combined efforts of courage and reason to restrain them. But why should I hold them back? Does not my poor

friend deserve them? My sorrow will never pass away, and I consecrate it to his stainless and honoured memory.

"Forgive me, Maurice, my dear, forgive me, but I am not afraid of wearying you with my grief: my sorrow is too natural for your kind and noble heart not to share it. It is right and seemly that I should find in one whom I love so deeply and so sincerely, honour, kindness and sympathy. And now my only hope of happiness is in the continuance of an attachment which alone can replace one which has been so cruelly torn from my heart. It is not caprice, no vain and passing fancy, 'tis the happiness of my life that I place in your hands. Maurice, it should be a sacred trust.

"What you ask, Maurice, is impossible at the moment: think, how could it possibly be arranged? You are so anxious that I should not be compromised, you must not insist on what would be truly imprudent. Besides, *now that we are no longer apart*, you should not mind eight hours' delay, and you will understand that this ought not to *appear uppermost* in my mind. But in heaven's name do not doubt my affection. You cannot: you know it too well. It is too entirely yours for me to need to add another word on the subject. Good-bye: I love you more than myself: and each hour of my life, each beat of my heart, does but increase my love."

"PARIS. *August 28th midnight.*

"How can you ask me, Maurice, what my good fortune is? Did you not notice *the date of my letter*? Otherwise you could not have asked such a question. Was it a matter of no importance to you and to me whether I dated it as I do this one for instance, or the one from the place where we last met. I have left it to come *here*, here, where, I must

admit, my friends are so kind and so good to me that they have closed at least one wound in my poor heart: I am *here*, surrounded by my true friends, my children, and if there is anything wanting to such happiness as can be mine in my deep affliction, it is not to have you here as well.

"Good-bye, Maurice. Think of me often, always."

"PARIS. *September 2nd.*

"I have just spent three hours with a kind old friend of mine (our neighbour in the country). He is leaving to join the army to-morrow, and before he went, he had just offered me his hand, his life, his fortune, indeed all that he had. His attitude was so noble and so generous, that it made me weep. Have I not always said that G. . . was a dear good youth?

"I must tell you about another friend of mine of whom you have often heard me speak, but whom I think you do not know. He usually lives in Flanders where he has a large estate. He is much in favour at court: perhaps you can recognize him from this.

"Caroline[1] received a letter from him yesterday in which, after speaking of my misfortunes, he said: 'I don't know where *she* is and I am writing to you to ask. My carriage is ready and I only await your command to get into it and go to her wherever she may be. If you like I could pick you up as I go through Paris.' There, I hope, are marks of friendship that are not confined to words and empty protestations. For the rest, I can say with the most grateful pride that my friends have remained faithful to me and that I have received the most touching proofs of their concern and their devotion. My dear, believe me that a woman who

[1] The Baroness Lallemant.

is loved like this cannot be as wicked a creature as people have sometimes tried to make you think.

"The Empress's return was announced here for Sunday and not Monday. So I shall see you a day earlier. I so long to see you that I think I should fall ill if I had to endure much longer: and then, Maurice, whom are you with? You know my fears, you must reassure me. Tell me this woman has no longer any claims upon you: that she can no longer disturb my life. Oh, do tell me: indeed I would have your letter tell me nothing but this. You must reassure me. Tell me that your heart is mine and mine alone. I have suffered so much, Maurice. I do so need happiness and it is you and you alone who can make me happy.

"Good-bye: answer this, and be careful to answer my question.

"I was finishing my letter without saying anything to you about your sister,[1] your sweet sister who was as dear to me as my own, and to whom I am now attached and devoted for the rest of my life. How glad I am I said to her, '*Everyone that loves you* has a claim on my heart.' She guessed my feelings and she knew that you are everything to me. Tell her, Maurice, that her concern for me has touched me more than anything that has happened to me since my disaster. And your poor little Augusta[2]? Did she hurt herself very much? Tell me about her and give her a kiss from a friend whom she does not know but who loves her as much as her mother. See how I share in all your affections."

"*September 6th.*

"Yes, there is surely madness in my head and in my heart, but who is it that unsettles my mind? Is it not you, Maurice?

[1] The Marquise d'Assay. [2] Augusta d'Assay.

Why do you reproach me with an excess of affection which indeed makes me quite desperate and for the last few days has given me a fever and made me so ill that yesterday evening my friends were really anxious about me?

"I can't think what there was in my letter to upset you. Was it what I said about my friends' regard for me? When I mentioned their friendship, I meant nothing more. You ought rather to be glad of their kindness ('tis nothing else) to me at this crisis. As for my affairs, I forget whether I told you in my last letter that they have taken a very bad turn.

"Listen, I must see you. My need to see you is greater than my need of the air that I breathe. Think of the 10th of this month: you cannot spend this day away from me. Ask for a few hours' leave: you really must.

"I have just been to take the air at Auteuil. I walked in that very avenue where you too went in search of memories. They are very painful in the absence of the loved one. I found it so just now.

"Good-bye. I press you to my heart, that poor heart that is entirely yours and yours alone. It belongs to you, Maurice, and will do so until it beats for the last time.

"Good-bye."

Laura remained at home but her affairs did not improve. The Family Council made every effort to deal with a position that was more than complicated. Every day revealed fresh creditors. . . . Laura had spent all her childhood in money difficulties: they were merely old acquaintances rediscovered, and they did not trouble her.

'This day, 7th September,' she writes. . . .

A year already since she met Maurice. Last year it was the day of Moskowa, and this year it is the eve of Leipzig!

Public affairs and her own destiny were slipping into the same abyss.

"*To-day 7th September.*

"When I think that I could have lived until last year without knowing and loving you, I cannot imagine myself, Maurice.

"You ask me for details of my manner of life. Heaven forbid that I should give you any! Nothing could be more wearisome. The morning is given up to the men of business whose society is not particularly amusing. I generally dine alone with the children: then my family and a few friends like Calo, Agatha Madame de No. . .[1] (Melanie) the white cat, the lady who looks like you, Monsieur de Ca. . . come and spend the evening with me in my little grey drawing-room until eleven o'clock. Everybody goes away then, and I am in bed every evening before midnight. By the way I have gone back to my little room I had last winter. How I suffered there! Do you remember, Maurice? But we will not speak of it. You have made up for it since.

"To-day is the 7th, Maurice. I would wager that you do not remember that it is a year to-day since we walked by the lake? . . . I remember it very well, and the 10th too. On that day I must see you – you must arrange it somehow. If you do not come – no matter how or when, I will never forgive you as long as I live. I shall have some good news for you that day, but I cannot write about it. I must see you: I must speak to you, and then if you don't love me for the rest of your life you will really be a monster.

"Good-bye, Maurice, good-bye. All the children are well. They are all with me and will not leave me for long –

[1] Madame de Noailles.

perhaps not at all. The handsome one likes you very much. He spoke of you this morning when we were out for a walk. By the way I told you I was embroidering a dress for Augusta: well, I have nearly finished it. It has been the sweetest employment to me of an evening.

"I open my letter to tell you that I have just heard that your cousin Labedoyère is severely wounded. He has been given three months' leave to get well. Do not say anything to either of your parents: his mother knows nothing about it. Madame de Sou[1] has just given me the news, which she had only that instant heard from the War Office. She warned me not to repeat it.[2]

"Good-bye again."

Junot's estate had been found to be quite definitely in hopeless confusion. The creditors were legion. The Family Council was divided into two parties. On one side, the Junots wanted to sell everything and by this decisive measure save enough to produce an income of about sixty thousand francs. On the other side, the Permon party advised that the establishment should be kept going. For this opinion Geouffre, the brother-in-law, for whom Laura

[1] Madame de Souza, mother of General Flahaut.

[2] Young Labedoyère, a fascinating youth, who was to know six months of radiant happiness in his marriage with Georgine de Chastellux; Maurice was one of the witnesses at his wedding. His tragic end is well known. He was a colonel in 1815. He brought his regiment over to the Emperor who had just disembarked from Elba. After Waterloo, hunted like a wild beast, he wanted to see his beloved wife again: he was betrayed by a servant, arrested, and condemned to death. Maurice moved heaven and earth to save him, and Laura even got Metternich to intervene. The King's advisers, rather than Louis XVIII himself, were stupidly obdurate.

coined the word 'Geouffrerie,' was mainly responsible. He would lose nothing by it.

Laura let the storm rattle on the windows. She amused herself with making extracts from a book called *Diversions on Duty*. A first marriage restored the Permon fortunes. Who knows? The sky may clear.

Since money must be obtained it was decided to sell part of the furniture. Then the tumult began. Everyone hoped to get some good bargains at the 'Little Plague's' expense. Even Pauline Bonaparte, then at Greoulx.

Paulette took advantage of the dreary boredom of her stay at Greoulx to reduce her love affairs to some slight order. Her two admirers of the last season at Aix unknowingly exchanged the presents which their mutual mistress had presented to them. Forbin, pressed for money, sold to the Princess for three thousand five hundred francs a dressing-case that she had given to him. Paulette got her present back for ready money; she had it refitted, and half the monogram removed – so that A.F. (Auguste de Forbin) became A.D. (Auguste Duchand), the initials of the newly appointed gentleman, who was given the dressing-case in acknowledgment of his services.

At the Abrantès sale the Princess gave orders that 'a good supply of Spanish wines should be bought for her, for the Duke had a great deal – about ten thousand francs worth, after they have been carefully sampled.' Paulette adds: 'I know the Duchess's sapphires are very fine and might be had cheap. M. Decazes, who knows her, would be a good intermediary.'

However it seems that it was not Decazes but Montbreton, little old Montbreton, Paulette's chamberlain and old friend, who was entrusted with this delicate mission.

"This evening I saw M. de J. . . (Jaucourt) who asked me a great deal about you. But he did so with such absurd affectation that I was tempted more than once to send him about his business as politely as possible. He told me repeatedly that he wanted to be my friend, my most devoted friend. There, Maurice, is an excellent opportunity, I hope, to make you jealous; what do you think? And for you to appear very jealous, though I don't think we shall either of us tear the other to pieces over him! I will think it over.

"I am so frightened of you when you are angry!

"Talking of anger, do you know that I nearly lost my temper the other day! Forgetful indeed! I should think so! In spite of my irritation I almost burst out laughing when Blanche told me where the thing had been found. Hardly romantic, as I think you will agree. Nor was I, either, when I went to sleep last evening. There were some people with me and by eleven o'clock my beautiful eyes were so completely shut that I could not even hear the touching grievances of poor Montbreton, who has almost as many as the Princess *Doloride*. Being anxious to console him, I try to make him look on the cheerful side of things and hope that his boredom where he is going will bring back his slim figure. 'Tis a dismal régime, and yet how many are obliged to follow it! I am very certain you do not. You are quite content, and your evening amusements, *Hunt-the-Slipper – Blind Man's Buff*, *Hide and Seek* – and a hundred other elegant distractions, are very much to the taste of a fine lad of twenty-five, who is still young enough to enjoy such silly games.

"I am engaged at present in making some extracts from a book called *Diversions on Duty*. As soon as I have finished I will send it to you.

"Good-bye, Maurice. Good-bye, *my poor Angel.* How I wish you were my guardian angel. You would not leave me, and then how happy I should be.

"Still no word from you."

Chapter XIV

KING JOSEPH had definitely lost Spain. He was reigning for the time being over Mortefontaine, half monarch and half prisoner, still maintaining a court, a ceremonial, and an etiquette in the severe Spanish manner. Savary used the Emperor's authority to prevent him coming to Paris, though Joseph pleaded that his only motive for going there was in quest of pretty ladies.

'At Mortefontaine whoever knew how to use his ears and hold his tongue was marvellously well placed,' writes a contemporary. 'Everyone is to be found there, even the Patriarch of India, Azauza Almenaca. It is full of Chamberlains, Palace Officials, Aides-de-Camp, Orderly Officers, who enliven the avenues of the park with their gay and gilded uniforms.'

There follows a lengthy catalogue of the family in which appear the 'Infantas,' daughters of Queen Julie, together with the entire personnel of the court, including, of course, young Balincourt.

'They breakfast in one of the pavilions in the park, and then go hunting, fishing or rowing on the lake; then dinner, a game of billiards, and to bed. No one talks politics.'

But on the other hand the love affairs of 'young Balincourt' were discussed. The fight between Laura and her rival, suspended for a moment by Junot's death, became more and more violent. The Duchesse d'Abrantès' news was, so to speak, overwhelmed by the torrent of imprecations and threats wrung from her by the forthcoming arrival of Mme. de Flotte.

"You are still at Mortefontaine, and in three or four days

your company will receive an addition which you know very well is most disagreeable to me. I am naturally jealous, and I am much more so with you because I have so greatly suffered by your fault. I have been made unhappy so often that I may be excused for being afraid, in spite of your repeated assurances that you love me more than her whose schemes and intrigues I so dread. But, Maurice, I know what I am like; as soon as I hear that woman is near you, I lose my self-control. I shall forget that you have sworn to me never to see her alone, and although I have entire confidence in your *sworn word of honour*, I shall feel deeply wounded when I know that she is there and I am not: that every moment may bring her near to you: that you are under the same roof, while I am far away and alone: when I am in despair, and have nothing to soothe my feelings but a few lines from you which I wait and long for as one longs for everything that comes from the loved one: and when your letter is late, for some quite ordinary reason, I am quite distraught."

It was the time of the *Levées en masse*. Everyone felt that the destiny of the world had been decided at Leipzig. Three days later, at the end of a long love letter, Laura wrote these two lines:

"You have heard the great news? Charles is commanding a Division."

'Charles' is Flahaut whom the Emperor had promoted General of Division on the field of battle.

Maurice is Mayor of Champigny, and had to send to the front the last levies that could be raised in his district.

"Come back, for Heaven's sake come back! What can

you have been doing there for such ages? Is the enrolment such a long affair? I should have thought that with a mayor like you the business would conduct itself: surely a tactful word or two emphasized by a blow of your fist on the table, – the matter is at an end, and all goes smoothly. Don't take what I say quite literally, for even if I think that energy and decision are what is wanted, I also think that good-will and kindness are much more likely to succeed. Remember the old saying, 'Kindness is better than violence.' That is always true, in every situation of life and especially in that in which you now find yourself."

On October 25th Laura writes again as follows:

"If you want to avoid disasters and scenes that may be unpleasant for you, for me, and for those who are with you, come and see me again without delay: the mere sight of you, the sound of your voice, a look from your eyes, will bring back a little peace to my mind. But in the name of Heaven, do not exasperate beyond endurance a despair that is only too ready to break out. My reason goes for nothing at the moment. I know that woman is now at Mortefontaine. This is a season that is fatal to my health. Two years ago, on my return from Spain, my little Alfred fell dangerously ill in this very month of October and was at death's door for a fortnight. The shock it gave me made me fall ill, a few days after he was out of danger, with this terrible nervous affection which last year attacked me again at the same time, as the result of all you made me suffer.

"You know, Maurice, that I have never liked speaking of Madame F. . . I do not like her, but I thought myself for that reason obliged to keep silence, especially where you were concerned, and you know to what lengths I have

carried my discretion. If I break silence to-day to tell you she is a bad woman, I have every reason for doing so and I maintain what I say. You tell me she is embittered by grief and disappointment. That is no excuse. It is only at such times that a woman reveals her soul and her whole character. A woman who in a state of happiness and peace behaved badly in cold blood and said and did what was evil, would be a dreadful monster, abhorrent to nature and rejected by society, of which there are happily very few instances. It is only in the situation in which Madame de F. . . has found herself that a woman shows what virtues and what vices Heaven has bestowed on her. If she is dominated by a feeling that is stronger than her principles, stronger than any goodness that she may possess, she will be lost, because the entire universe will give way before her love, but she will go alone to her destruction. The bad woman, all whose worst passions are awakened by the most imperious of them all, will let them loose to work what havoc they may, and she will even destroy the object of her affection if only she may be revenged. She will not hesitate to use the basest means! – espionage, falsehood, slander and calumny. Maurice, I cannot remember where I have read this phrase '*Birth breeds nobility*,' and never were there truer words. When I say 'nobility' I am not using the word in the moral sense, but I maintain that a fine, large and generous mind is inseparable from good birth and the education that necessarily goes with it. Madame F. . . is an illustration of this. If she had been educated as the daughter of a gentleman and nothing more she would have blushed at the very thought of saying what she has said about you and me, of uttering such loathsome calumnies in a drawing-room in the presence of a dozen women and as many men, Ministers

of State and persons of position, who blushed for her and left the room speaking of her with contempt.

"What I find particularly wicked in her, is her redoubled animosity at a time when I am so unhappy: especially when she said that *never had a sentence of exile been so well deserved.* Poor creature! what would become of her if justice were done to her in this matter? No, Maurice, I say it again: she must be a bad woman. You must trust my experience and my judgment. She has a bad heart. I am certain of it. This is the last time I shall mention the matter, and I want to tell you before I finish that your letter of to-day gave me pain. You are quite welcome to be sorry for her if she is unhappy (which I do not think is true), but you must be sorry for her without telling me about it, and devoting two pages of your letter to the matter. *I also* am miserable: *I also* have suffered: *I also* have been brought low by sorrow and despair."

"*Friday*: *midnight.*

"You could not write because you had to entertain her, and I could not because I was at the point of death. The day before yesterday, after writing to you, I had such an awful attack of neuralgia that I fell into a fever which resulted in a much worse attack than any you have seen: so much so that I had to have opium poultices on my head to get some relief from the pain that was driving me crazy. . . .

"You cannot conceive what was said about us the other day. I am ashamed to write down the details, and when I see you I shall hardly be able to tell you them. Maurice, be careful of that woman. She does not love you and she shows it. She is now telling everybody that the Princess instigated

her to do all this, whereas it concerns no one but herself. That is surely malicious enough. This was said at *the mother's* house. Say nothing of all this, for I shall not tell you another word if you let any of it outside the drawers of your writing-table.

"My position to-day is exactly as it was a week ago and, on the contrary, my affairs look like taking a better turn than I expected. I had forgotten to tell you that I am to keep my children. As far as I am concerned therefore there is nothing more to distress you than there was a month ago. I can hardly suppose that your friends regard your attachment to me as a crime? This venomous persecution will force me to find out what is really at the bottom of it. I shall go to Mortefontaine and I shall ask the Q. . . for an audience and I shall ask for it in the presence of the K. . . I have laboured too long under the burden of an injustice which I do not understand: it must now come to an end, especially as my life's happiness depends upon it. A few random words might explain dislike but not hatred. That alone could justify the general opinion regarding her s. . . (sister). I say once more, I have made up my mind. I shall come with my brother, whom the K. . . has liked and respected for twenty-five years. If the Q. . . refuses to see me, which I can hardly believe, I will see the K. . . He will understand. I shall ask for justice and I shall get it, because I am innocent. I love you. That is not a crime as far as the Q. . . is concerned. If that were so, people would say and think very odd things about her s. . . Your affection for me must be a matter of indifference to her provided you do your duty zealously and loyally. When all there is against me is a few careless words, that will hardly justify a desire to ruin my happiness and destroy my life, especially when she is so

kind to everyone else. An isolated hatred of this sort, directed against one person only, is incomprehensible, especially when the object of it is labouring under all manner of misfortunes.

"Listen to me, Maurice, listen to me in your own interest and mine, and in the interest of all those who may play a part in the dreadful scenes that are perhaps in store for us; I do not know what your friends there want you to do, but listen to my oath, which I shall renew every quarter-of-an-hour I live: I swear by my children, whose existence is my very soul, that I will never give you up. You are mine, you belong to me, and if I give you up I die. My love is now no longer a crime. I am not afraid to proclaim it and to boast of it in the eyes of the whole world. I am proud to love you. I am yours, and were the heavens to fall upon my head I would never give you up. I am sure that all those about you are treacherous enough to try to alienate us and make us quarrel, but if you are weak enough to keep silence while your unhappy friend is being done to death, be sure that I will make myself very clearly heard. There is nothing that I would not do. You may be certain of it, if we have a repetition of the scenes of last year. What do these women want? Your heart? It is mine. Love and honour bid you keep it mine. What right have they to come and take it from me now? Do they love you more than I do? Have they shed more tears than I? Have they suffered equally with me? Have they the thousandth part of the love that fills my soul, of that utter devotion which makes me throw at your feet my life, my future, my whole existence, so that I am but a poor slave who lives but to love and please you?

"I don't know what you mean when you speak of my new friend. Because he wants to be my friend that does not say

he is so. I have but one friend, and one only, and that is you, Maurice. Doubtless it is to the interest of those who are with you to persuade you that I do not love you. It is easy to leave a woman whom one thinks will not mind, but you, Maurice, can hardly believe such a thing. My heart is yours: you know it as well as I know Joséphine's: all that can be found there is love of you and you only. I will claim the faith that you have pledged to me even at the steps of the throne. Maurice, remember the state I was in last year at the same time. Nothing then could induce me to give you up: do you imagine now that my love has had time to deepen, such a sacrifice would be possible? No, I am yours and you are mine. Her hopes are futile – let her give them up. They could not be realized except by my death.

"My portrait is finished, and that is the price you must pay for it!

"Good-bye, Maurice, good-bye. If I loved you less you would not receive letters like this, but I cannot help it: it is my fate to love you just as it is yours to torture me continually. I must ask you to say in your reply what it is that you have to tell me *by word of mouth*, and what it is about. If you do not, you shall not have the portrait. I had better tell you that people here are talking about an intrigue between you and the Queen of Westphalia. I did not believe it and I defended you, perhaps I was wrong.

"Maurice, I wait for your letter as one waits for something that one longs for more than life."

The friend to whom Laura refers, and who seems to have been her first weakness, is General Alexandre de Girardin, father of Émile de Girardin. He too was a rough soldier, and Thiébault who was savagely jealous, and among whose

virtues generosity was not very prominent, acknowledges his soldierly qualities. At Austerlitz, when Morand's column was beginning to give way, Girardin, who was a major-general and aide-de-camp to Marshal Berthier, came up at full gallop to find out how things were with Morand.

'His duty would certainly have been done,' says Thiébaut, 'if, after having carefully observed our situation, he had hastened away to report it: but it was a critical moment, and with a devotion and valour to which I, who am the last surviving eye-witness, feel bound to testify, he stayed with Morand and myself, and galloping backwards and forwards up and down our lines, almost grazing the men's knapsacks, if I may use the phrase, he was of the greatest possible assistance in rallying them and urging them forward: he did not return until we had again taken the offensive, and he left all of us full of the highest respect for his character.'

Eight years before Girardin had been in Laura's good graces. Indeed she herself admitted it to Maurice.

"I have spent the evening with someone whose name I shall not tell you until I see you. I used to love him very much and he also loved me passionately: but eight years have gone by since various circumstances parted us. 'Ah well,' said he, 'it does not seem like it: I should like to blot out those eight years from my life, and yet I cannot when I reflect on an unfortunate misadventure that I most bitterly regret, now that you are situated as you are and I see the possibility of uniting my destiny with yours. Ah! Laura, I know how much I loved you when I think of *the others*'. All other feelings are cold and insipid to one who has been loved by you as I was. I cannot see you or be in your

company as I am now, without recalling the first day I fell in love with you.'

"I must tell you that the scene which I had thought could be nothing but an agreeable exchange of pleasantries, became at last so serious, that he was all tears and despair, and at two o'clock in the morning I was still engaged in helping him to collect himself, which I could only do by telling him that I was yours, that I loved you passionately: that nothing could alter my feelings except your own conduct, and that even then, though I might no longer be yours I could not belong to another.

"This morning I woke up with a furious headache. I am really upset about it all. He was such an intimate friend whom I relied upon so much. I hope he will recover his senses! Ah! when the lapse of eight years have passed the sponge over a relation of the kind, and when, in the interval, the heart has been filled by another affection, how mad the man must be to think the first one can be rekindled!

"Good-bye, Maurice. I am giving you a very notable proof of my regard for you: I am giving you my confidence. I hope it is not misplaced for you must surely have guessed to whom I am referring.

"Good-bye. If you do not want to hurt my feelings, make arrangements to see me soon. You see that if you had taken the trouble to make a trifling enquiry, you would have stayed a day longer with me, but!!!

"I am just waking up. My first thought is of you. You need not trouble about Girardin. I certainly loved him very much, but this recollection is perhaps what damages him the most, because I said to myself that he was the man I loved the most, and when I compare my feelings for him

with what I feel for you to-day, I find them cold and worthless.

"I must leave you now. Caroline and Agatha have just come to luncheon and are to go shopping with me afterwards. Good-bye, my dear: joy of my life. I clasp you to my heart and I tell you once again that I think of no one and nothing but you. Good-bye."

Laura returns to the same subject more than once so as to awake Maurice's jealousy.

"I feel so very sorry for poor young Alexandre. He came to see me yesterday evening, and you cannot imagine how greatly he has changed. His wound has opened again and he pretends that I am responsible for all this owing to the pain and annoyance that I have caused him. I am more inclined to admit the latter accusation than the former. All men want *one thing only*, and when they do not get it they persuade themselves they are in distress when they are merely annoyed, a condition which hardly calls for the compassion that they wish to inspire."

Many years later Laura wrote in one of her last letters:

"Do you know, a strange thing happened just now. When I took up my pen to write to you, my heart began to beat faster: why was that? Because I have never loved anyone as I loved you. I was saying so this evening to Girardin who replied with a wry smile: 'Indeed I know it only too well.' "

"*November 14th.*

"My only friend, my one heart's delight. You ask for news, my dear one, but I have none. I have, like everyone

else, seen the Address from the town of Pau, and I have also heard that the Emperor has lent the palace at Compiègne to the King of Westphalia. By the way, the new Grand Marshal is an old friend of mine.[1]

"I clasp you to my heart."

"It is one o'clock, and the last of the people who have been here this evening have only just gone. I spent a good day with an old friend of mine who has just come back from the country, and came round at once to invite me to dinner. I mean Madame de Noailles. She is so dear a friend of my childhood that I can't tell you how delighted I was to see her. You would find in her another enemy, Maurice, if you wanted to behave badly to me again.

"I am looking forward to hearing how you were received. Write soon, and come back even sooner if that is possible. All this is pitiable and really beneath the most ordinary attention. Try and be *yourself*: respect yourself and others will respect you. Do not let your affections be directed like those of a lad just out of college. Do your duty, but your love must be at your own disposal. My heart is yours, and it would indeed be a dishonour to sever bonds that for the last eighteen months the passage of time and the strongest proofs of affection have drawn so close.

"Good-bye, Maurice. I am going to bed. I am exhausted. I spent the morning with the dear Duchesse de Raguse and Madame de Brancamp[2] who is in the deepest despair. The Emperor has granted a pension of eighteen thousand francs to the Duchesse de Narbonne, my poor friend's mother,

[1] Bertrand, Junot's predecessor in Illyria, who, as is well known, accompanied the Emperor to St. Helena.

[2] Daughter of Narbonne.

and six thousand to the widow: and he is very sorry to have to do so much. This evening I repeated to Mélanie Madame de F. . .'s pleasant remarks, but, this time, I mentioned names. She opened her eyes very wide indeed, and then said quietly. 'But, my dear, it is your fault. Why frequent such bad company? You deserve what you get if you permit yourself the acquaintance of a woman who could say such a thing.' She is quite right!

"Good-bye, Maurice, good-bye. I hope for the future that my name may not be associated with that creature's in your head and in your heart, and I shall then forget her instead of despising and detesting her.

"Good-bye: I embrace you with all my heart's love."

Narbonne, kindest of friends, and, according to the Memoirs, Laura's spiritual father, had just died at Torgau, of which place he was Governor. It was Narbonne who had introduced Metternich to her, and it was Narbonne, too, who had written to Laura when he heard of Junot's death: 'Use me as you would your father, or your brother; I tell you frankly that if I were in such distress there is nothing I would not ask you to do for me. I shall be so glad to get a word from you.' The circumstances of Narbonne's death have hitherto been unknown. We are fortunate enough to have before us at the moment the unpublished manuscript of General Baron X, who was present at the last moments, of the great man about whom so much has been written – by Napoleon himself among others.

"He attended to the duties of his office with a zeal and devotion that were quite unexpected in a courtier. He impressed everybody by his dignified bearing and affable

demeanour and in spite of his inexperience, it would have been hard to find a Governor for Torgau who would have inspired more confidence or got better results. His exalted ideas of his rank did no harm to anybody, though they were constantly to the fore. While I was talking to him one day and playing with his seal, on which was engraved the red-barred shield of the Narbonnes, I recalled the phrase of Gonsalve in 'Florian,' 'The Castilians thought to recognize the brave Lara by his red shield': and I repeated the words aloud thinking to gratify him. He answered with elaborate carelessness: 'Yes, they were the arms of my family.' But he said it with such an air as to make me understand that they could not apply to him personally. In my humble opinion I would have preferred, in his place, to have been descended from the Castilian hero, than from an irregular union, and one which is pretty generally considered to be incestuous. M. de Narbonne liked the thought of having royal blood in his veins, however tainted the source from which it had been transmitted.

. . . . . .

"The *morale* of the troops had been too greatly weakened by the epidemic, for much to be expected of them. Two hundred died every day and more than that number were admitted to hospital. Hardly any convalescents emerged from these asylums of agony. The soldiers not unreasonably concluded that it would be better to do without any treatment they might get there and so avoid such dangers: and they accordingly concealed their condition until they were in the last extremity so as to avoid an order for the hospital, which they regarded as a death warrant. They died in barracks, in the streets, even on duty, and the most shocking accounts of the plague could not give an idea of

the desperate state of the Torgau garrison. Never have twenty-five thousand men infected with so terrible a disease been confined in so small a space and never has the death rate in such circumstances been so high.

"In the first days of November the number of deaths reached three hundred daily and the admissions to hospital, in spite of these losses, left hardly a vacant place.

"The Comte de Narbonne caught the disease on the 7th, and died in a week. The violence of the infection that was destroying us was such that, on the day of his death, when a poultice that had been applied to his stomach was removed, the skin came with it and the entrails were exposed and found to be in the most horrible state of putrefaction. I was much cast down by his death and what added to my grief was that I had been the occasion of it. One day there was to be an inspection of new drafts: I suggested he should attend, and as he was very keen in such matters, and as his bearing and demeanour had an excellent effect on the men, I had no difficulty in persuading him to come. He came wearing a superb uniform, without a cloak and very lightly clad. He felt cold while the men were marching past, and quickly mounted his horse as soon as the ceremony was over: but the animal made a sudden movement and he was immediately thrown. The same evening he was seized with an attack of shivering, brought on either by the cold or by his fall. On the following day typhus declared itself and a week later he was no more. I had the same symptoms at the time, but I was younger, and a profuse perspiration which supervened averted the disease. The only result was a profound weakness from which I suffered for several days."

JOSEPH BONAPARTE, KING OF NAPLES AND SICILY, AFTERWARDS OF SPAIN

From an engraving after the Portrait of Vicart

Chapter XV

THE campaign in France had begun. Maurice went off to spend Christmas near Falaise at the house of his sister, the Marquise d'Assy. Laura was uneasy: she felt that in such surroundings he might escape her.

As was her way, she began the contest at once, though not openly to begin with: she would not allow the idea of his family to draw him away from the Rue des Champs Élysées, where the remains of her fortune was being dissipated.

Napoleon had had the unlucky notion of leaving King Joseph in charge of Paris during the opening of the campaign. Once more King Joseph was unequal to a task that was, it must be admitted, extremely heavy. The Emperor's illusions about his brothers had been gradually disintegrating, but they suddenly reappeared in all their completeness, like certain kinds of crystals that dissolve and form once more a few hours later. Joseph, in fact, made every difficulty he could and his two brothers became involved in a protracted series of bargains and negotiations. It was not until January 10th that Napoleon saw the ex-king of Spain.

Laura wrote on January 3rd.

"The King's arrogance and obstinacy are making the most deplorable impression here in all circles, from the populace to the highest ranks of society. They are saying, I dare say rightly, that even if the Emperor had made a thousand mistakes, this was not the time to make him feel it. He ought on the contrary, to have given him every possible help and support, advised him as best he could, and tried by his kindness to soften his disappointments

instead of making them more bitter. This is what is being said, and even those who do not like the Emperor think the K . . . is behaving badly. They point out that the Emperor's brothers would have been nothing had it not been for him, and they recall his witty remark when the Queen of Naples and the Grand Duchess of Tuscany were dissatisfied with their share in the spoils. 'It really seems as if we were dividing up the inheritance of the late king our father!'

"I find all this very distressing and I would give several drops of my blood to put an end to this absurd quarrel. *I really believe that these women are keeping it up to prevent your coming back here.* I shall be seeing someone from *up there*,[1] and I shall suggest this. Good-bye, Maurice. I am not at all well, and my children are having dinner while I am writing to you. I felt so ill that I could not sit down to table and I tried to cheer myself up by writing to you. I wonder if I have succeeded! I am ill and I shall not be well until I see you. You must ask for leave of absence, as I suggested. I swear I want you to help me in my affairs. I cannot tell you any more, but in this connection the situation is even *more urgent than ever.*

"Good-bye, my dear, come and bring your answer yourself.

"By the way, would you like to be Lieutenant of Hussars and A.D.C. to the Prince of Neufchâtel? Say the word, and it shall be done."

The campaign in France was to last for a hundred days. 'Bonaparte tried to save Napoleon.'

The letters of Maurice and Laura grow rarer for they were together.

[1] Probably The Tuileries.

The end of the Imperial régime was obviously at hand and everybody began to remove their interests elsewhere. Laura explains her attitude of mind in her Memoirs.

'The invasion destroyed such property as I had left. I saw only too clearly that the entailed estate was lost. The only inheritance that my unhappy husband had been able to leave to me and the children, the price of his blood and his devotion, was gone. All that was left was an appalling load of debt amounting to 1,400,000 francs.'

'In my differences with the Emperor, after the death of the Duc d'Abrantès, I venture to say that I showed him the best side of my character, and none of that *obstinacy* of which ignorant people have dared to accuse me! I was proud in my humiliation: am I to be reproached for that? Perhaps my pride should have given way to my children's interests? That is a very difficult question and, to ask and answer it, it would be necessary to be intimately acquainted with both the Emperor and myself! Besides, the Emperor answered it by doing nothing for my children when he was at Saint Helena. I am not speaking of myself, for he did not like me. I suffered from this neglect; I say this truthfully but without bitterness. I can also speak equally frankly of my feelings when I found myself alone in the world at a time when France threatened to collapse. The Emperor himself was not in Paris. Among those who were, I had no friends left like Duroc, Bessières, M. de Narbonne. Alas! They were *all* dead! And I remained, alone and deserted. A young mother and a young widow, I realized I was the sole support of my four children.

'It was then that my uncle Demetrius, the head of our family and the last of the Comneni, came to see me and told

me to be brave. *Albert who had been in Italy and had then only just come back*, was the greatest help and support to me. Often, when I saw my four children gathered round me, without an idea of what was to become of them, I felt myself giving way, and rushed into my room so that I could weep freely.

'My uncle reassured me and said (and Albert said so likewise) that the King would do what was proper for my children and myself. . . . That was on March 19th 1814.'

The date is very significant. Nothing was yet lost. The Emperor was getting near the end of his resources and Laura already admits, a fortnight before the surrender of Paris, that she had placed all her hopes in the King's return. This Demetrius Comnenus was one of those dubious adventurers who prepare the way and watch how the wind is going to blow.

'My uncle,' Laura writes, 'was a strange personage. He had good parts and education. He was extremely sensible of his distinguished origin – perhaps unduly so – indeed in this matter, though in no other, he reminded me of an old potentate of the seventeenth century. He did not look upon himself as a French gentleman, and the distinction which he drew between his own origin and that of the nobility with whom he constantly associated, made him regard it, as may well be understood, with something like hostility. Yet he was devoted body and soul to the Bourbon family: in particular, the similar situation of the two dynasties, made a strong appeal to him!'

Unlike Napoleon's satellites, Maurice always regarded the Emperor with a respect, slightly constrained though it

might be, that remained with him all his life, like those Polish gentlemen who were forced by the course of events to serve under colours that were not their own. In his later days he wrote the following words, which reveal more clearly than eighteen volumes of Memoirs, 'the imprint of the Corsican's hand.'

"The grateful recollection of all the kindly affection that was lavished upon me in my youth by that august family will never fade from my heart or my memory."

Still, he was a Balincourt. His tradition and his feelings acknowledged but one master, the King of France. It was a King who led the Balincourts to the Holy Land, and it was a King who placed a Marshal's bâton in the hands of one of them. Five centuries of loyalty are deeply rooted in this young head. Maurice followed the example of all the young men of his class and served the Emperor. In the words of M. Madelin, 'In the Faubourg St. Germain the old people let the young ones join the new régime.' It was, for them, an improvement on what had gone before and no doubt they secretly hoped the right side would come back.

Maurice's conduct was logical, and his hopes were perfectly legitimate.

The adherents of King Joseph were plotting against the Emperor. Frederic Masson states this definitely: 'General Dessoles was the first to plunge into conspiracy and at once found himself in Jaucourt's company, who was already involved.' As for Maurice, Masson states that 'he took up his rôle so quickly that we may be sure it was not unprepared.' Laura and he exchanged some mysterious communications: we have no clue to their exact meaning.

King Joseph left Paris on March 30th and authorized the Government to capitulate. . . .

Comte Edgar de Balincourt, Maurice's son, has left us an account of his father's life, from which the following passage may be quoted.

"King Joseph, who had been entrusted with the defence of the capital, had deserted it on March 30th. In the course of that day, young men belonging to Royalist circles, might have been seen galloping along the boulevards, scattering money and white cockades, and shouting 'Vive le Roi.' Comtesse Hélène Potocka gives their names: the Marquis de Levis and his son, the Marquis de la Ferté, Maurice de Balincourt, Fernand de Chabot, Thibaut de Montmorency, Finguerlin and Germain, these eight soon increased to two hundred, cheered by immense crowds."

On April 7th Maurice, who had done his part in establishing the new order, was appointed captain on the staff of General Dessoles, whom he had known at Mortefontaine. His wife had been a constant visitor there.

The Allies had come. Laura became one of the reigning ladies of Paris. The Emperor of Russia visited her, Metternich teased her, and the Allied commanders made the most gallant attempts upon her virtue.

The Emperor was rolling southwards attended by foreign commissioners. It was on April 26th that Napoleon went to see his sister Paulette on the outskirts of Hyères.

Laura writes to Maurice:

"This morning I was forsaken by all my adorers so that my powers of flirtation have not been much in demand. But as some compensation for this painful deprivation I

had the great pleasure of seeing my dear Montbreton once more. He had driven straight to my door, so as to pay his respects at the earliest possible moment. He has lately spent a day in the company of our kind master who has been to see his sister Pauline, and arrived at her house disguised as an Austrian officer, wearing the cross of Marie Thérèse and a battered old cap on his head. Montbreton is more careless and light-hearted than ever. I have never known him so regardless of consequences, and I can't help feeling that if ever he is hanged, which looks not at all unlikely, he will watch his own journey to the gallows. Well, may God keep him in joy and mirth, as our forbears used to say, though he is not in the least like them.

"This is a long letter, but I dare say you have nothing to do, and you may just as well read my letters as yawn. I don't say *sleep*, for I pay respect where it is due, and I would not presume to contend against sleep, as I suppose in the Royal Palace sleeping is no more permitted than swearing. I hope those beautiful eyes of yours will not close, and that, if you yawn, you will do so decorously.

"Good-bye, my dear. It will be a depressing day, for I shall not see you. Knowing this, I have no other wish than to see the end of it.

"Tell me, at least, that you love me, and me alone, and give me one moment's happiness. Good-bye, my dear."

In spite of the invasion Madame de Flotte and Désirée had not laid down their weapons: far from it. Désirée was now all-powerful. Bernadotte, her husband, had come to Paris as a conqueror and was awaiting his hour. His ambitions were immense and he had not yet revealed them. He would gladly have exchanged Sweden for France.

These ladies who were living, says Laura, 'in that dreadful house,' in the Rue d'Anjou, took advantage of the fact to deal a neat little blow at Laura.

'I had gone out for a walk,' writes Laura in her Memoirs. 'When I got back I found my servants in a great state of alarm. My butler came and told me that an officer on the staff of the Prince Royal of Sweden, accompanied by some others, had come to the house about an hour earlier, and inspected it from garret to cellar.[1] When he was told that an officer of the Emperor of Russia's suite was lodging in the garden rooms: "Very well, then, he must go," was the insolent reply.

' "But," said Joseph, "where shall we put him if he is turned out?"

' "Isn't there a room with a billiard table, which we have just come through?"

' "That is my mistress's room," said Joseph indignantly.

"Who is she?" said the man, still in the same offensive tone.

'Joseph was on the point of forgetting my orders. He had served under my husband: and he had been through the campaigns of Egypt and Italy. He had been dreadfully upset to see the enemy on French territory, and he was quite overcome when they reached Paris. But to be insulted by them in his masters' house was more than his French heart could bear.

'He replied to the Swede's question with a contemptuous look.

' "The mistress of this house," he said at last, "is the

[1] The cellar was justly the most famous of any private house in Paris. Its contents were worth more than 200,000 francs.

widow of a man at whose name Frenchmen and foreigners should take off their hats (the man had kept his on his head), I mean General Junot, Duc d'Abrantès. If he had been, as he was when alive, Governor of Paris, you would not have been admitted to his house."

'The fellow replied with a shrug of the shoulders and continued his calculations for billeting troops in the house. He even went so far as to *mark the rooms*, as is done in conquered countries.

' "This room for the colonel, this for the general . . ."

' "I have already told you," said the butler, "that this is Madame's room."

' "I am obeying my orders."

' "And whose orders?"

' "Those of His Royal Highness the Prince of Sweden."

'They then departed, and I came in a few moments later. My butler told me what had taken place. My first impulse is always sudden. I ran to my writing-table and wrote the following letter.

' "My Lord,

' "It is now a fortnight since Paris has been occupied by foreign troops. I have not been offered the slightest offence by officers or men of whatever rank. I must confess that it is as strange as it is painful that the first insult I have received should be upon the occasion of your Royal Highness's arrival in Paris. In the conviction that it was not your Royal Highness who gave orders that my house, hitherto respected by all parties, should be violated by someone belonging to your household, I beg to complain of what has taken place here this very day, in the hope that you will give me complete satisfaction."

' "Not an hour after my letter had been taken to the Prince of Sweden's house in the Rue d'Anjou-Saint-Honoré, Monsieur le Comte de Brahé was announced, his chief A.D.C. I think, but certainly the politest and most courteous emissary that he could have chosen.

'There followed apologies from Bernadotte, who was, no doubt, not desirous of inquiring into these ladies' affairs.'

In the unpublished diary of General Lejeans, we read that in the spring of 1814 he met Madame de Flotte at the Rue d'Anjou and even dined with her several times. It was probably in the latter part of the year 1814 that, finding she had been definitely abandoned, she resolved to put an end to her life. Two years before, Laura had written: 'She was very beautiful: she died soon afterwards in very tragic circumstances.'

Here are the brief passages in two letters in which Laura speaks of her death.

"Listen to me. I am ill, and ill from the misery that you inflict on me. Yes, you: ask Pasquier. At this very moment I am in a burning fever and can hardly see to hold my pen. What can you hope for? For my death? Remember Madame de Flotte. Do you wish me to be a second victim? I am quite willing, but what harm have my children done to you, that you should want to take their mother from them? I swear I will not live an hour after I am convinced that I am nothing to you."

And again:

"I must get used to suffering. It has become my lot. I need only remember the sad fate of that unhappy woman who loved you too much and death was her reward. That,

no doubt, is my destiny: and if the time is at hand, far from avoiding it I should welcome it with open arms."

Maurice had piously preserved the enigmatical portrait of an Unknown. It is a pastel and the features have been altered by the wear and tear of a hundred years. The chalk that gave it life has been rubbed off in places, and the lines are no longer clear. A hat of Italian straw is pulled down on each side of a forehead on which the paper is now showing through. Is it the face of the lovely Greek who 'loved too much and death was her reward'?

In 1817 Laura admitted Madame de Flotte's posthumous revenge from which she still suffered.

"Several times you have sobbed all night long in my arms, because (as you said) you were so dreadfully haunted by the memory of her from whom I took you: and you had the brutality to tell me that you had never loved anyone but her."

Chapter XVI

At the commencement of the Hundred Days Napoleon sent Rovigo to the Rue des Champs Élysées to ask Laura to come to the Tuileries.

The Duchesse D'Abrantès flatly refused, she tells us, and left Paris.

Laura had good reasons for her sentimental retreat. She was *enceinte* . . . and went with her two sons to spend the spring of that year, 1815, in her lover's house, the Château de Champigny. 'Champigny,' she wrote later, 'where I had the happiest time of my life. Good-bye: I cannot see, my eyes are filled with tears.'

Champigny is a village overlooking the Paris-Sens road from the right, ten kilometres beyond Montereau. It is no longer the Ile de France, and not yet Burgundy, as Laura thought. Beyond Fontainebleau she looked on the whole district as in some sort a fief of Junot's, for the ex-sergeant of Volunteers of the Côte d'Or conceived himself as almost Duke of a country where he had been born and whose patron saint was St. Andoche.

Maurice had Champigny from his mother, whose maiden name had been Bernard de Champigny. She had died in the prisons of Sens, under the Terror, as is still recorded on a sealed inscription on the cemetery wall.

The old place still retains vestiges of its splendour. The noble spaciousness of the outbuildings may still be appreciated in spite of adaptations and the ravages of neglect and decay. The nineteenth century with its mania for systematic destruction has passed Champigny by. The house was partly rebuilt in the plain rectangular style of the Empire. The interior decoration, the fireplaces, and even

the furniture belong to the period when Laura 'spent the happiest time of her life here.'

Outside, the 'plantations' have become avenues of hundred year old trees which surround the now empty orangery: its semi-circular doors look perilously near collapse and are sadly out of the perpendicular.

A month before Waterloo, while the Emperor, dressed in white satin, was engaged in the celebration of the Champs-de-Mai, at Champigny the spring was bursting into flower.

"The country is enchanting. The lilac is completely out and the park at this moment is a veritable paradise of flowers. The syringas are in bud and will be in flower in a few days. There is one rose tree on which there must be a hundred buds already formed; the tulips are still lovely, but the hyacinths have quite faded.

"So come soon. All our little tasks are progressing: the small drawing-room is papered, and I assure you that it looks very well indeed: now that the billiard room is ready you can ask Royal Personages to come and stay with you, if you feel like it. I am still very unwell: my mornings are really dreadful: however, I must be patient, but I should be much more so if you were with me.

"We have had to send Lovely to the Curé at Villeneuve; he has a husband for her very like herself. There was nothing else to be done, the place was becoming overrun with all the mongrels of the village: she has gone off this morning, and, I think, between ourselves, that she is very pleased, for her little head was dreadfully full of love!

"M. de Brigode, from whom I had a letter yesterday and who thinks you are at Champigny, sends many kind messages."

Laura sends some jam from Bar.

"Why am I not in the place of my gooseberries in one of my little glass jars? Then I should soon be on your lips. How silly I am!

"Good-bye, think of me."

Then the catastrophe.

Ten days after Waterloo the hostile flood was bearing down upon Paris. What matter . . . had not the beloved written a 'kind little letter'? Things must improve, and Laura answers on June 28th.

"Your kind little letter received this morning made me very happy, because I see from it we shall soon be together again. If political affairs could be brought to as prompt a conclusion as our own it would be a very good thing, but I hope it may be so, for our unfortunate country deserves to be happy: and I pray Heaven earnestly every day that we may come out of all this to the glory and honour of the nation and the happiness of our fellow-countrymen. When one sees a nation so gallant, so brave, and so generous in renunciation, one cannot but wish for a happy peace. I am sure it will be so; I feel it in my heart.

"Good-bye, my dear. Shall I tell you once more that I love you? No, it is hardly necessary. That truth ought to be engraved upon your heart. Think of it always; let it be your rule of conduct and thus you will make your beloved happy. Good-bye. Best regards to M. de Garitz."

Fouché made abdication inevitable. Maurice is of course delighted. Laura goes further. 'I never paid homage to wickedness out of regard for public opinion. I was always more of a Royalist than a Bonapartist.'

"I was so glad to get your letter. What welcome, what splendid news! At last we can utter what has so long been suppressed. Heaven send that you may be already engaged in that delightful occupation which I should so like to share with you. Fouché's example shows that it is possible for a rascal to reform. In spite of his Lenten countenance if I were anywhere near him I would give him a hearty kiss on both his pasty cheeks.

"And what is *the Tiger* doing? Has he been put in a cage at last? If not, he really ought to be, if only for the sake of the people he has betrayed. Do I sound a bloodthirsty little creature when I say such things? But look at the condition to which we have been reduced and what we have been forced to do? Neglect and ill-treatment are not very agreeable when unduly prolonged, and I don't think one is much to blame for wishing a little harm to those who have made one suffer so dreadfully!

"Still nothing fresh in our own affairs. All day yesterday I could not keep down even a spoonful of soup. I just managed to digest some food at midnight. It is now two o'clock and I have not been able to sleep yet.

"By the way, have this letter sent to Madame de Bréhan, but don't go yourself. You know my feelings and my suspicions in this regard. You must not do anything to justify them. Good-bye, send the letter by a sure hand."

We have found in Laura's Memoirs the following sentence written . . . later.

'The wretched creatures who dared to dress the Emperor in a tiger skin.'

Perhaps she was then recalling Champigny and the far-off scent of the early lilacs.

"I don't know what I am writing. I have not eaten nor slept for three days. Yesterday I was at Montereau with M. Emengard to get some news. A few soldiers were running through the streets shouting, 'Down with the Royalists: down with the Bourbons: Royalists to the guillotine!' One of them said: 'If I could lay hold on one of the dogs I would cut his throat with my own hands.' Really I was in such pain that I felt like offering myself to his knife. But perhaps there was no need, for I may become their victim anyhow. I am alone, isolated, without protection or defence.

"Good-bye. I hope my blood will not be upon your head."

A few months before Montereau had been the scene of some epic feats of arms. When General Delort, just at the moment of attacking, saw the youths that had been sent to him from the depôts, he was horrified. 'It is madness to expect me to charge with such cavalry.'

'Then,' writes H. Houssaye, 'these beardless lads might have been seen sweeping through Montereau like a waterspout, riding down the Austrian battalions huddled in the streets. . . . Elsewhere, cuirassiers who could hardly sit a horse, broke up five squadrons, and laid about them with such vigour that no quarter was given. . . . Throughout the campaign not a shout was heard in their ranks that was not an acclamation of the Emperor. Hail, O Marie-Louises!'[1]

[1] The reference is probably to an Order of Knighthood for women, instituted by Charles IV of Spain for his Queen, Marie-Louisa, and intended for noble ladies distinguished for their virtue, etc. (Translator's note.)

At nine in the morning, on July 4th, Laura who had been much upset by her journey to Montereau, wrote this further letter in which Junot's lady writes in the style that is reminiscent of the one-time Colonel of Hussars.

"So you desert me in the midst of danger, and with no excuse – on some empty pretext that M. de G. perhaps invented at your request. You know I am alone with my two poor little creatures, and two imbecile old men as my sole defence: and all this time you are happy, gay, and undisturbed. Those who have seen you say you are *looking marvellously well.* You think no more of her who ought at least to be your very dear friend, and who ought not to look to find in you that fatal ingratitude which has always rewarded whatever kindness the unhappy creature has shown you. Our bonds are not indissoluble. I knew it and there was no need to point this out so cruelly.

"When I placed in your hands the care of a life which you must remember that your cruelty has already forced me once to give up, and the lives of my two children, I made no appeal to love – for a long time now you know how much faith I have put in what you say about that – but I really thought you would not withdraw your support at the only moment in my life when I am seriously in need of it. When my tears were choking me, the day you went away, you were very angry with me: you seemed to think I was very much to blame because I used the word desertion: yet judge yourself and judge me. Who is in the wrong? I wish you may be happy. You must indeed be so to be as you are reported to me, as gay and well as you would have been in a time of the most untroubled peace.

"I have just been obliged to break off my letter. The

tocsin is sounding loudly at Vainneuf or Courlon: the wind is rather strong and prevents me hearing in which village it is: from M. Puy's window one can see no sign of fire. Can it be the enemy? If, as the newspapers say, they are going through Troyes there would be nothing astonishing in their breaking out towards the left and descending on us here. I am waiting for the dawn which will soon be here, in the most cruel anxiety. If it proves to be the enemy I shall take refuge in the woods and while you are soothing your lady's fears or (better still) calming her with your caresses, I shall be picking my way among the briers and stones to try and find a refuge for my two children and the one I bear within me."

"*July 9th.*

"Good-bye. You must not be false to your true character by continuing to pretend to feelings that are no longer yours. It is actions, not words, that are needed.

"When I wrote the letter that upset you, as you said, my poor head was quite distracted. I had not left my room for forty-eight hours and I had taken no nourishment. I was ill, I was alone, the weather was dreadful, and I was saying to myself that in a few hours I should perhaps have to leave my refuge where I am so utterly happy to face in solitude the dangers that are inseparable from such a position. All this did not happen and my terrors were groundless, but nothing was more likely than the realization of such fears, and in so sad a moment, to whom could I appeal if not to you, my only friend and the mainstay of what remains to me of life.

"I must positively go to Paris. I cannot live without you. I have no life in me since you went away. I left it in my last

LAURA, DUCHESSE D'ABRANTÈS
From an engraving by Gavarni

kiss, in that kiss that my trembling lips laid on yours. I must renew it by seeing my lover and my King once more.

"If you only knew how fat I am getting! It is the oddest sight! The process is so quick it must be almost visible. Tell this news to –.

"Good-bye. I clasp you to my heart, which is always and will never be other than yours.

"Do go and see my daughters. Albert and Napo embrace you – though you haven't even thought of them once. Ungrateful – always ungrateful."

Laura went back to Paris, while Maurice took her place at Champigny. She complains bitterly of this and gives some news of the Court and of the Town.

"*July 23rd.*

"All you tell me in your letter upsets me dreadfully and does but add to all our troubles here. You know, no doubt, that Paris has just been laid under a contribution of 9,600,000 francs, for the provision of rations for the troops, in addition to the 1,500 millions that they seem definitely proposing to extort from us and which will cost us the last drop of our blood. Metternich whom I saw yesterday evening, and who spent several hours with me, is in despair at not being able to stem the torrent of misfortunes which is engulfing our unhappy country. What can we do? We can but resign ourselves. However, the King, who is always dignified, always the most loyal and patriotic citizen in his kingdom, addressed a note to the Allies yesterday. This note, from what Brigode has told me, is a real masterpiece and is his heart-felt and sincere expression of despair at the sight of his children labouring under these dreadful misfortunes. It is wholly the work of the King who, the

day before yesterday, in a moment of lively emotion occasioned by the story of some dreadful hardship – merely one among many thousand – took up his pen and without sitting down, composed this document which is worthy, so they say, of Cicero himself. Could he do otherwise since his mind and heart were equally touched? Oh, my King, if all your subjects were only as devoted to you as I am, there would be none of these unhappy troubles that do but add to what you already have to bear. I could wish that all those Frenchmen, now unworthy of the name, were so damned in the eyes of public opinion that they were forced, like the Jews, to wander over the face of the earth and beg for a little corner of it to settle in.

"Am I cruel? Good God! can one feel otherwise when one sees that horde of rancorous malcontents, – and there are all too many of them – rallying to the standards of folly and insensate rage: they see the worst in everything and ascribe to our unhappy King misfortunes that are wholly due to that monster whom, in their inmost hearts, they cannot forget. What do such people deserve? Surely death, or a long exile – yes, I think, the latter. The furthest shores could not be remote enough.

"As regards the Tiger, I have written to Madame Lallemand.[1] I was dreadfully upset by her distress and I thought perhaps she might be grateful for some consolation . . . and I was certainly rewarded for my pains. I got the most singular letter back. To give you an idea of it in one word, she said that 'She wished to wait a little while before seeing me so that she might, in the interval, *forget the injury that I had done her*.

[1] General Lallemand had taken part in the rising in the North and had just been proscribed.

"My dear, by this time the Prince of Wrède's[1] Bavarian safe-conduct will have reached you. I send you his reply to Madame de Bréhan. As for the Prince of Schwarzenberg's order, that is quite useless. Such an order is never given when one is provided with actual protection 'in kind' as Wenzel says. The Duchesse de Raguse has only one man at the house and everything is in such perfect order that she has just gone to spend two or three days there.

"My very dear one, come back to me soon. Each absence is a fresh proof to me that life without you is impossible. I do not exist without you and I think and speak only of you. Metternich told me yesterday that it was positively wearisome. So much the better! I do not care. How can I help worshipping you as I would those celestial Beings of whose existence we are aware but we cannot clearly conceive. You have such a noble heart, so angelic, and so rare in the times in which we live, that she to whom you have given it can but treasure it and realize its worth. O my beloved, I wish I were beautiful enough in your eyes, and good enough to give you what might make your life happy. But I have so many rivals! Ah! Maurice, Maurice! When I say to myself that during an absence of only a week you could not stay faithful to me, how much have I not to fear?

"Good-bye. Give my two little angels a thousand kisses. Clasp them to your heart and you may believe for a moment

[1] In the family records put together by Edgar de Balincourt, Maurice's son, we find the following statement:

"The Emperor Alexander had sanctioned a special exemption for the Château de Champigny. The magistrate who informed my father of the German requisitions, asked him to convey his respects to Madame la Duchesse d'Abrantès."

that it is their mother. Poor little treasures, when shall I see them again? Come back soon, or I shall come and revisit my trees and my beloved flowers, and all that peace and happiness which I have found there alone and nowhere else. Good-bye, I embrace you, and adore you more than my life.

"By the way, the other day Madame Regnault was publicly thrashed in the Tuileries. What do you think of that?

"You have sometimes reproached me with weeping too easily, and this evening you would certainly be right. For three days I have not been able to stop crying, and if anything can quench these bitter streams it is my firm intention to go and join you and leave everything to be in your company. What do my affairs and my future matter? Without you they are nothing.

"You ask me for news from Paris. What shall I tell you? We are still melancholy and harassed. Yesterday the English sergeant who commands the picket at Lord Cathcart's house tried to take the cook-boy's dinner, and when the latter resisted, beat him about the head until he was all bruised and bloody. The unhappy lad called for help: Joseph and Legendre ran up and arrived in time to seize the sergeant's arm just as he had forced the poor lad to his knees and was about to run his sabre through his body. He has been arrested and I think he will be shot. And these are English soldiers! And there is a General in command in the house! Think what they would be likely to do in an unprotected house!

"M. Auguste de Talleyrand, Prefect of Orléans, has been arrested by order of Blucher and conveyed to Saint Cloud, where he will be confined in one of the suites of rooms until the full amount of the levy has been made. The King has

requested his release, but to no purpose. The King has appointed him Councillor of State as a compensation for this unheard-of treatment. Poor King: he is much to be pitied.

"I cannot tell you any more about politics. My head is too full of my own sorrows, and I cannot forget them. The image of you and your surroundings is always before my eyes, in my heart and in my head, and nothing will drive it out. I transport myself in imagination to that paradise where the days and months went by with the lightning speed of true happiness. Good-bye, it is four in the morning. My eyes are dreadfully painful from wakefulness and weeping. I shall go to bed, not to sleep but to give a little rest to a being that needs it more than I do, and to think of someone else than myself. Good-bye, if you do not come I shall start. If I do that, apart from the harm I may do myself, and the discomforts I shall undergo, think of the scandal and gossip that will be caused by my departure. It is all in your hands. Good-bye."

"*August* 15*th*, 2 *o'clock.*

"My dear, dear one, here at last is your exemption order, or rather an order from the major in command of your Germans. I thanked Wenzel the more heartily for it since, at the moment I received it, I was eating one of those excellent peaches that you sent me, and I was thinking that it would be a great pity if these wretched Germans robbed us of all these treasures. I am sending with the order a few little delicacies to thank you for your kind sweet recollection of me. But why should I be surprised at it: everything from you goes always to my heart?

"I have just been interrupted. It was Lord Cathcart who

brought me an invitation from Lord Wellington and the Emperor of Russia to spend the evening at the Duke's house: quite a small party. But what is really amazing is that the old wretch has started his games of last year over again, and with just the same freedom of behaviour. I thought perhaps that if I treated the affair as a joke I might give him quite a wrong impression, and I got extremely angry. 'My lord,' I said to him, 'I suppose your manners may be ascribed to the low company you keep. But I cannot forgive you for thinking that I belong to it. Nothing, I fancy, in my conduct can excuse your extraordinary lapse. If I wanted to punish you I could cover you with ridicule, but I will content myself with this personal protest. But do not allow this to happen again or I shall order you out of the house.' He went away quite crest-fallen and I don't think he will begin again.

"This, my dear, is how I treated the old Ape and I think you will approve. Truly I think it was he who came the other morning. Good-bye, dear one. Your Laura kisses you with all the affection that is in her heart. Good-bye, a thousand kisses on those pearly teeth of yours, and on your lovely eyes."

But Maurice still did not come.

"I do not understand what you mean about your small box from Villeneuve. It was put on the coach on Sunday evening, and you should have had it on Monday evening, because, as you might have noticed, three francs was promised to the carrier if the box was delivered on Monday before two o'clock in the evening, and you do not mention it until three days later. What does this mean? I dare not say all that is passing through my head, but as a matter of

fact, I have a sort of fear lest you have made some excursion which I have not yet heard of. If I only knew. . . . I know quite well that you will deny it, but what can I think when you make such pitiable excuses as the presence of foreign troops? France is covered, swamped with them: are you going to allow yourself to be stopped by every fresh picket that you meet? Really my dear one, I cannot forgive you and I will only do so if you help me to, by letting me clasp you in my arms. If you refuse, if you still make this idiotic excuse of 'stragglers,' an excuse which may hold good for three months, I shall be really angry.

"Here is General d'Audenarde who has just come in, and Lord Cathcart, and my sister-in-law, and Wenzel and all the rest of them. Good-bye, my beloved: I kiss you a thousand times. I shall write to you to-morrow for the last time, for I shall expect you in two days at the latest.

"Good-bye, you have all my love.

"P.S.—My dear, it is too late to send the pastry off this evening. It will arrive on the evening of the 17th. I shall post this now."

At length Laura begins to hint at a stay in the country where no doubt the inevitable took place.

"I have been very unwell especially in the evening. You will find me much fatter than when you went away. I am going to settle down in the country next Wednesday, and I am happy to think that you will be with me then."

It was a daughter, and was called Laura after her mother. We have been unable to ascertain the place or the exact date of her birth.

She died soon after. "She was," says Laura, "an angel of Heaven whom God called back to Himself."

Chapter XVII

On October 12th, 1815, Maurice was given a commission as captain in the Lancers of the Guard. His squadron was then in barracks at Melun. Laura kept up an active correspondence with her lover. Three of her letters have been selected; they are, in some sort, three pictures, and form a triptych of the closing months of that year, the saddest in the history of France.

The letters give a great deal of unpublished information about events with which historians had thought themselves fully acquainted.

Marshal Ney had just been condemned after a sensational trial.

"Paris. *December 7th.*

"As you know, Marshal Ney was executed this morning at 9 o'clock precisely. But you will never know except from me, all the incidents that preceded his death.

"Pasquier, who is physician to the Chamber of Peers, was, in that capacity, obliged to be with him until the last moments. It was just after he had carried out his sad duty that he came to see me and told me the story that I am going to write down for you. I got him to tell me it twice over so as to be more certain I had made no mistake. Yesterday evening, the 6th, the Marshal was taken back to his prison at 11.30, as you may have seen in the paper, while the House remained to consider his sentence, but as newspapers always misrepresent the facts, the statements that the Marshal slept and ate well are inaccurate: the following are the true facts. As soon as the Marshal got back he asked for supper: it was served to him, but on this occasion no knife was brought.

He noticed this, and asked for one rather angrily. Observing that there was some delay in bringing it, he repeated his request with a volley of oaths. At last he was given a knife, but of the English pattern, while all those he had had till then had been pointed. He picked it up and threw it violently from him: 'Do these b . . . think I want to kill myself? They don't know I have seen death more often than they have thought about it.' Then he fell to eating, but without enjoyment, and soon left the table, after smoking a cigar, and lay down fully dressed. There were two grenadiers in the room with him.

"Far from sleeping, according to the newspaper account, he found it impossible to close his eyes. He was very restless and kept on drinking large glasses of water to quench his consuming thirst, as he told the grenadiers. At last he could endure it no longer: he got up, took several turns up and down the room, lay down again, got up once more, lay down again and finally got up saying: 'Why the devil can't I shut my eyes to-night: it can't be all this business which has put me in such a state!' Tired of drinking water, he asked for a bottle of Malaga and drank a small glass: and this sent him at once into a deep sleep.

"He was still sleeping profoundly when at ten minutes to three o'clock in the morning, M. Cauchy, Clerk to the Court of Peers, accompanied by two ushers in their official robes, and two officers in full uniform, entered the prison to read him the sentence. The Marshal was awakened by the noise they made in approaching the bed, sat up at once and rubbed his eyes.

" 'Who is there?' he asked. 'Ah, it is you, Monsieur Cauchy. Well, what is it?'

" 'My Lord, I am charged with the painful duty of reading to you the sentence of the Court of Peers.'

" 'Very well, proceed.'

"Monsieur Cauchy then began to read, but at the end of the first page the Marshal interrupted him, saying: 'Don't you suppose that since I have been in prison I have learnt the Penal Code by heart? I know it better than you do. Come to the point and don't waste time.'

" 'Monsieur le Maréchal,' said M. de Cauchy, 'the capital sentence was pronounced, the penalty of death.'

" 'Sir,' said the Marshal: 'to a man like myself you must not speak of the *penalty of death*: you must tell me that "my hour is come." That is how I ought to die. However, conversations of this nature ought to be as brief as possible. You may withdraw: you must be tired. I have the honour to salute you.'

"With these words he turned away, and they went out. From that moment he did not again sleep. At five o'clock he got up and asked to see his wife and children. M. de Montigny, Deputy-Governor of the Luxembourg Palace, immediately wrote as follows to the Maréchale:

" 'Madame, Monsieur le Maréchal wishes to see you. I entreat you to come to the Luxembourg at the earliest possible moment.'

"These few words told everything. The poor woman was there in half-an-hour, alone except for her sister, Madame Gamot. No sooner had she reached the bottom of the staircase than she fainted. Pasquier at once rushed to her assistance and after a few moments she recovered consciousness, and supported by the strength of despair, she quickly went up the stairs to the prison and, with the most piteous lamentations, fell into her husband's arms.

"Pasquier had followed her, foreseeing that *there*, above all, she would be in need of his assistance: and indeed, she could hardly speak for sobbing, and in the short space of twenty-seven minutes, she completely lost consciousness three times. After a few minutes the Marshal asked to see his children. They soon came: four boys, the eldest nearly thirteen years old. When the poor mother saw them she sobbed and cried even more bitterly than ever.

" 'My dear,' said the Marshal, 'calm yourself. Show a little of the courage that you have always shown when we had to part. I might have been going to my death, though we were not sure of it, as we were sure that we should meet again. Well, we have still the same hope to-day: although the separation will be longer than any that have gone before . . . (and as the Maréchale cried out that she should not survive so dreadful a blow): 'No, no, my dear, you must live for our dear children, to bring them up and lead them in the path of virtue that you know so well, and to tell them constantly that in politics there should be no enemies. I beg you – indeed, I command you – never to let them think of my memory as associated with ideas of revenge. If I had not done what I did, I should not be here. Let us be fair.'

"When he had tenderly embraced his children he sent them away at the end of half-an-hour, and remained until half-past seven closeted with his wife and Madame Gamot. Then, as the military authorities, in whose charge he was since his sentence had been pronounced, observed that the time of his execution was drawing near, they considered how to get the poor wife to withdraw, and Pasquier was deputed to go and explain to her that she had no time to lose if she wished to make any further efforts for her hus-

band. She tried to get up, but nature had received so violent a shock that her legs would not sustain her. However, a cordial that Pasquier gave her procured her some artificial strength. She quickly embraced her husband and rushed to the Tuileries, convinced that she would see him again.

"No sooner had she got into her carriage than the Marshal was informed that it was time for him to turn his thoughts to God. He responded with a volley of oaths and blasphemous curses. One of Rochejaquelin's grenadiers who was on guard in his room, hearing him shout like a man possessed, said:

" 'But, General, why won't you see the priest? Why won't you make your confession? I who have the honour to address you have been through seventeen campaigns, and just before the battle, I said my prayers, drank a dram of something warm, and felt quite fresh and cheerful. Believe me, it always cheers one up. Everyone has some little matter on his mind: well, one gets rid of it, and I tell you it does one good.'

" 'Do you think so?' said the Marshal. 'Very well, where is the priest? Fetch him in. . . .'

"The Curé of Saint Sulpice was immediately sent for and in a few minutes he was with the Marshal.

"Oh, Maurice, you must share my admiration for the talents of this good man: or, rather, we should prostrate ourselves before the Divine Providence, a ray of which touched a heart until then so rebellious, and filled it with reverence and piety, and the true courage that is known only to the servants of God.

"When the Curé entered the Marshal's room the latter was seated and did not get up as he came in.

" 'Come,' said he, 'make haste. I don't know why you are here: I suppose we must do as every one else does, but don't take too much time.'

"The Curé signed to the grenadiers to withdraw, and as he proceeded with a discourse suited to the occasion, he so softened that hard heart and laid it bare, that it was not till an *hour and a quarter* had elapsed that the Curé of St. Sulpice left the room. The astonishing change in the Marshal's expression was then most observable. It was clear that he no longer belonged to this earth of ours, and that those great consoling truths that he had in some sort just learnt, in making known to him the existence of an infinitely good and merciful God, had opened the door placed by His all-powerful hand between this brief life and the life eternal. His insolent look and audacious air, that seemed to defy heaven itself, had gone. He was not less calm but more collected. He said no more and when the Curé of Saint Sulpice entered the room in silence, he found him leaning against his writing table, his head resting on his hand. The priest's silence explained everything.

" 'I am ready to follow you,' said he: 'forward.'

"He was wearing black silk stockings, laced shoes, black breeches, and a long coat, and wore no orders (although none had been taken away from him). He buttoned his coat, put on his beaver hat, and said: 'Let us go.' He walked down the stairs briskly and reached the great gate looking on to the garden, where a public coach (no. 617) was waiting for him inside the garden itself. He took off his hat to the Curé and with great deference took his arm to help him into the carriage. He then jumped in lightly, and the carriage went off at a walking pace. It was surrounded by infantry, and cavalry and the windows were closed and

barred. The carriage turned towards the left and reached the Observatory.

"When they got to the appointed place, he fell on his knees to receive the priest's blessing. Then he got up, and would not allow himself to be blindfolded.

" 'A Frenchman,' said he, 'ought to be able to look upon death with confidence.'

"There were two platoons of veterans, twelve men in each. Only the first was called upon to fire. I was told that the officer was so greatly moved that his order could hardly be heard.

"Alas! How dreadful it all was! To send to his death one who was for so long the pride of the French arms! But the greater he was, all the more terrible was his fall and the more odious his crime. It is exactly because he was at the pinnacle of honour and glory he should have been the beacon to light upon the path of honour those who might have been tempted to depart from it. However, my views on all this have long been what you know them to be. Of course I was sorry for him, I wept over his tarnished and faded glory, and I wept for his unhappy wife and children.

"Poor soul! While her husband was being done to death, misled by her false hopes she was wandering round the Tuileries, unable to get in. At last at half-past ten, she saw the Duc de Feltre getting out of his carriage: she almost fell at his feet.

" 'Take me to the King,' she cried sobbing, 'take me to the King. I am sure that if he sees my despair he will pardon him.'

"The Duke, who knew that all was over, was quite overcome, and as the Duc de Duras was passing at the time, he

referred her to him telling her that he was more likely to be able to get her an audience of the King. The Duc de Duras took her by the arm and led her home. I don't know how, for she had gone to the Tuileries on foot. When she was told that all was over they say that her despair was such that her life was in danger. Poor woman! Poor mother! And the author of all her misery is living in placidity and peace; he will die with a contented mind for I doubt if he knows remorse. And the victims of his cowardly ambition, deserted by him at the hour of danger, even in their death, could take no pride in their devotion and so find some consolation.

"Good-bye. I am half asleep. It is four in the morning. I clasp you in my arms."

All Paris was talking of La Valette's escape. Condemned to death after a most unfair trial, he escaped from the very jaws of justice.

'M. de la Valette's appearance,' writes Laura, 'was extremely grotesque. His figure was in the Bacchic manner – two small legs supporting a prominent stomach; and his face was farcical: little eyes, a nose about the size of a pea between two huge fat cheeks, the whole encircled by an aureole of locks in which each individual hair could be counted.

'His marriage was not a little odd. A few days before he left for Egypt he married Mademoiselle Emilie de Beauharnais, daughter of Monsieur le Marquis de Beauharnais, brother-in-law of Madame Bonaparte. This young person was an awkward match in view of her parents' situation. They had divorced each other, the father to marry a German Abbess and the mother to marry a negro. These complica-

tions had made it rather difficult to provide for the unhappy daughter, who had, moreover, no fortune. She was indeed ravishingly beautiful, sweet, good, and perfectly educated, thanks to her aunt's care. At last M. de la Valette fell in love with her, which was natural enough. What was far from natural, however, was that she returned his feelings with all her heart. The marriage took place and the husband left for Egypt, leaving his charming wife in Europe.

'As the result of all the matrimonial quarrels of her two mothers and her two fathers, including the black one, no care whatever had been taken of the poor deserted child. Moreover, although she was eighteen years old, she had never been inoculated and as the scourge of smallpox always favours a pretty face, the army was hardly in sight of Malta before Madame de la Valette, lucky to escape with her life, had exchanged her face for a new one.

'She was in despair, and at first refused to live. She thought herself hideous and indeed she was very much changed. She was no longer the woman that M. de la Valette had married. She deliberately sent her portrait to him in Egypt. I believe it was captured by the English. As regards his inevitable feelings when he came back to find her so greatly changed, I think he was far too considerate to let his wife suspect that his affection for her was in any way diminished. But I have reasons for believing that she thought it was. His kindness prevented him betraying the fact. But her continual tears, persistent melancholy, the distaste for life that she was never tired of expressing, often caused the good kind M. de la Valette much distress of mind, for he would have shed his blood to make his wife happy. I have some particulars of the matter which make Madame de la Valette's action really noble.'

"*December* 21*st.*

"Once again you are far away from me, my beloved. We are, in truth, parted for a few days only, but we *are* parted; and I can think of nothing else, just as, when we are living in the same place, I can think of nothing but being always in your company.

"M. de la Valette escaped, yesterday evening at 7 o'clock. I have all the facts from a Great Personage whose interest it was to find them out. I need not name him, but you will I think recognize one whom I asked you to invite to my house one evening, the day of poor Edouard's affair. The following are the bare facts. Yesterday evening at 6 o'clock, M. Anglès, the Prefect of Police, went to the Conciergerie and spoke to the porter. He asked if M. de la Valette knew that the execution was definitely fixed for to-day, Thursday, at noon precisely. 'No, he doesn't,' answered the porter: 'I had not the courage to tell him. The good man is dining upstairs with his wife and daughter and her governess. They are as calm as anyone could be in their position and I confess I haven't the heart to carry this bad news myself. Oh my God,' he went on, 'Why did not the King grant him a pardon?'

" 'My friend,' said M. Anglès, very gently: 'your reflexions are much out of place : in your position you ought not to permit yourself to make them. The reasons which guide the King's acts must be good ones: everyone who, like ourselves, knows his goodness and his justice, cannot but think so. I leave you to your duty. You must warn your prisoner. If you would rather not do so this evening, then you must do it early to-morrow morning without fail. He may have certain arrangements to make which will take him a few hours. His lawyer and his confessor are, as you

know, the only people who may see him. I need not impress upon you,' M. Anglès went on, 'the responsibility of your post. Remember,' said he, looking hard at the man, 'that you are answerable with your head for the prisoner's life and that the future of your wife and children is at stake.'

"The porter assured him that he would punctually discharge his duty, and M. Anglès went home where twenty guests were awaiting him for dinner. They were still in the middle of the first course when an usher of the Chamber of Peers came and told M. Anglès, in a low voice, that the porter of the Conciergerie wanted to speak to him at once, and that he looked very frightened. At these words M. Anglès gave such a start that M. du Bouchage, who was sitting near him, thought that something had happened to the King. (I have these details from somebody who was dining with M. Anglès, M. de B. . . .) M. Anglès at once left the table and found the unfortunate porter in his study, more dead than alive: he stated that about a quarter of an hour after M. Anglès' departure the bell had rung for M. de la Valette's door to be opened, as was the custom every day, for his wife to be let out. He at once had her sedan chair brought up to the door, for the effects of her last confinement prevented her going in a carriage. She went out leaning on her daughter and the governess, sobbing bitterly, and with her handkerchief over her eyes. The child and her attendant got into the carriage, Madame de la Valette into her chair, and they all departed. A few moments later, the porter, reflecting on the extreme grief which Madame de la Valette had displayed at her departure, thought they had heard that the date was fixed for to-day, and thinking that M. de la Valette might have some orders to give, he went up to his cell. Judge of his surprise when

instead of his short and stout little prisoner, he found a tall and lovely woman; indeed the nobility and courage of her sublime act had cast about her a splendour that made her a thousand times more lovely.

"Utterly dumbfounded, the unhappy man could scarcely stammer out a word or two to ask where his prisoner was. 'He is saved,' said she, with perfect self-possession: 'He went out just now dressed in my clothes. You may imagine,' she added, with an angelic smile, 'that it is more than useless to ask me any questions. A woman's devotion does not stop half-way: so you may spare yourself the trouble of interrogating me.'

"The porter, who was about to give way to a despair as terrible as the gaoler's in Robert the Devil, bethought him, however, that it would be better to go in pursuit of the fugitive, instead of throwing the chairs and tables about, and called out all the door-keepers of the Palace. After half an hour's search, they returned, bringing with them the sedan chair, in which M. de la Valette had been carried away: they had found it lying empty on the Quai des Lunettes.

"M. Anglès, having got all he could from the porter had him at once confined in one of the cells at the Prefecture; he also had his wife and children arrested, together with the entire staff of the Conciergerie. And that is how the matter stands at present. Madame de la Valette is still in prison. I am told she is at Vincennes, but am not sure about that: I don't believe it myself.

"One incident in the affair M. de la Valette will find very remarkable when he hears of it, and that is this: M. Bellart, the Attorney-General, was, since four o'clock yesterday afternoon, by virtue of his office, responsible for M. de la Valette's person. Until the time which had been fixed for

his execution, in the extreme agitation and distress into which he had been thrown by these untoward incidents, he forgot to countermand the orders for the erection of the guillotine. The workmen duly went to the Place de la Grève, and the entire scaffold had been erected by half-past ten. So he can say: 'the scaffold was prepared for me.'

"This affair gives rise to a good many reflexions. Doubtless it is very fortunate for the prisoner and his family that he has been saved, but it may have painful consequences for the rest of us. The King is at least as good hearted as he is intelligent and he would have pardoned the man had he not, in his extreme wisdom, seen that he could not grant such a favour without injury to the rest of his people. It is not my affection for the King that induces me to speak thus.

"I look at the matter quite dispassionately. I do in fact look at it from two distinct points of view. I was la Valette's friend and as such I am delighted he was saved. But again I am one of the mothers of France, anxious that order, and *good* order, should be kept. But I shall be asked how this man is concerned with affairs with which he asserts that he has had nothing to do. Nothing to do, indeed!

"But I must stop. I am writing reams, and it is half-past three.

"Good-bye, my beloved one. How happy a woman must be to be able, like that angelic creature, to risk her life for one she loves; I wish I could do likewise but I am certain that you are none the less convinced that I would shed every drop of my blood for you.

"PARIS. *December 24th.*

"I not only share your opinion, my dear, on the unhappy la Valette's want of delicacy in leaving his wife as a hostage,

and, in a measure, responsible for him, but, glad as I may be that his head is still on his shoulders, I regard his escape as extremely inconvenient at this particular moment. Those persons who are opposing the Ministry, and consequently the King, draw from this unfortunate escape all the conclusions that malice and bad faith can suggest. As if the King needed to draw a veil over the benefit she wishes to confer! But how can one reason with madmen, who in their anxiety to overthrow the Ministry again, are so lost to all sense as to propose to put in the place of M. Decazes . . . M. de Neuville: in that of M. de Richelieu, M. de Fievée! M. de Fievée!!: in that of M. Marbé-Marbois, M. de Grosbois; and so forth, for you may imagine that when such folly was reported to me it was so contrary to my way of thinking that I did not take the trouble to listen any further. My poor Decaze, so honest, so good, so excellent and capable a man, what more do they want than virtue and uprightness combined with admitted ability? And the dear Duc de Richelieu! Where will they find his equal? But they do not know what they want. Their party is like a disreputable drawing-room full of people with diametrically opposite opinions and intentions: there follows a battle of which we, poor peaceable and well-intentioned spectators, are the melancholy victims. Miserable men! Why does not God allow them enough good sense to see that there is no salvation for the decent elements in the country except by and through the King. How good he is! My regard for him has increased since these accursed Houses of Parliament torment and irritate him instead of helping and supporting him in all the good works that he wants to carry out.

"My dear, you too must think more and more of the

King: you know my regard for him; I am sure you are not jealous of that."

'Lord Wellington,' says Laura, 'was charming in his relations with me. The Duc d'Abrantès had the greatest respect for him: he had impressed his views on me, and I was the friend of Lord Wellington though the enemy of the English General.'

'Wellington,' says M. Turquan, 'had shown Junot some courteous attentions when the latter had been wounded before the Lines of Torres Vedras. Knowing that the French doctors were short of medical stores, he had placed at Junot's disposal everything that might be needed for his treatment: furthermore, he had sent news of the wounded man to the Duchess and had forbidden Don Julian (a celebrated brigand) to capture her saying that "they were not making war on women." ' Peace had been made and Laura regarded the Duke merely as an agreeable foreigner.

"Let us talk of something else: the Duke of Wellington's ball for instance. I can tell you a few interesting stories about that. In the first place you must know that I took Joséphine, who was at home with me, owing to a cold, and also for the Christmas festivities. There was only one opinion on her pretty face and manners, her dress and her dancing, which has much improved since last year.

"The ball was very crowded. Eight hundred people had been invited. Joséphine was the Queen of the evening. Clothilde[1] was left out in the cold and her little vanity was wounded and quite hurt. The Duke asked me as a favour to dance a country dance. I did so with my daughter. The whole company stood round and watched us and the

[1] Clotilde Chodron, Laura's niece.

unfortunate English, who are quite ignorant of the world, said that I was the Gosselin of the drawing-room. There was a time when that might fairly have been said, but the praise is a little exaggerated now. While we were dancing, supper was announced. The Duke had it kept waiting, and signing to Prince Paul to offer his arm to the Duchesse de Richemont, he very gallantly offered me his, and made me sit at his right. Geouffre gave his arm to his niece, and I signed to him to put her as near to me as he could. The Duke, observing this, said to Lady Webster, who came to sit near him, 'Excuse me, Madam, but a young lady cannot be too near her mother. Would you be so good as to give your seat to Mademoiselle d'Abrantès.' Joséphine, as lovely as an angel, modest as a young Madonna, blushing strawberry-red at being in this way the object of general attention, came and sat on the left of the Duke, who was thus between her and me. I can assure you that the cream of the Faubourg St. Germain, who came up at that moment to get a seat at the Duke's table, round which twelve others were arranged, were not a little out of countenance at this marked preference for our family. After supper, during which the Duke made himself very agreeable, he asked Joséphine to dance for his benefit, for he said he took extreme pleasure in watching her: and indeed, apart from any question of a mother's vanity, she was charming. Listen to this, please, for I fancy some of her success is due to you.

"The supper was over. It was three in the morning and the company had already begun to thin out a little, when, beyond a rather more crowded group than the rest, I noticed the face of the Marquise de Coigny, mother of the Gustave who lost his arm, mother-in-law of Sebastiani, the lady in fact, that the blind man of St. Eustache always called

'Captain.' I replied to certain friendly demonstrations that she made, and paid no further attenton to her, for as I had seen her already during the evening, I thought that would be enough. But I was soon undeceived. In a few minutes she came up to me, bringing with her a tall, handsome lady, very fair and fat, who made me three or four curtsies, to which I replied with six even deeper ones; she then said:

" 'Madame la Duchesse, this is Madame la Princesse Bagration, who has for years been most anxious to make your acquaintance, and since her arrival in Paris is even more anxious to be introduced to you.'

"The other lost no time in opening the conversation and made me such excessive compliments that for an instant I thought she was making fun of me. Your little Laura was out of countenance; she had never met anyone like this before, and did not know quite what to answer. However, I finally succeeded in assuming my most imposing and magnificent manner.

" 'I should have made haste,' I said to the princess, 'as a Frenchwoman, to have paid my addresses to you, if I could have foreseen that they would have been welcomed, but not having the honour of your acquaintance, Madame, I could not tell what course I ought to take.'

"As our respective positions are identical, it was for her to take my references to myself as applying equally to her: but it was clear she did nothing of the kind and that she had quite made up her mind as to her attitude. She sat down beside me while Joséphine was dancing to and fro and used every possible means of flattering my personal and maternal vanity. All this did not prevent my observing that she had a wart on one side of her nose, and that both sides of her neck (which might otherwise have been attractive) were

disfigured by a dozen scars. So she was not a pleasing spectacle.

"Good-bye my dearest angel: Good-bye, my heart's love. This is a very long letter, but I flatter myself that you will not find it tedious. Good-bye. You will receive a hamper from me to-day. Do not bother any more about the book: it has been found."

Chapter XVIII

THE first six months of 1816 were spent in desperate struggles. Laura stopped up a few holes but dug abysses in the process. One fine day the crash came.

She had to leave her house. Followed by her 'household staff,' she took hasty refuge at Champigny, that 'delightful retreat.' The inhabitants of Champigny gave her an enthusiastic welcome.

"I am still so agitated by the events of the past day that I shall give you a very confused account of them. I have often been fêted of late, no doubt in a more magnificent manner, and very likely at a cost of 80,000 francs or more, but never better than here.

"On Saturday morning the good M. Puy had already presented me with so lovely an orange tree that it would certainly not be out of place in the Tuileries. You will perhaps think this an exaggeration, but I assure you that it is half a foot taller than the portrait of your great-grandfather, the Musketeer. I don't know where the kind foolish fellow got the tree from and I scolded him heartily for it: but the tree is really magnificent, and I am so glad to be able to offer it to you. It is an admirable addition to your collection here.

"The orange tree, which was loaded with its own lovely flowers, and also with ribbons and garlands was accompanied by a copy of verses: the tub was painted a beautiful green and decorated with gilt paper, and in the centre was inscribed: '*To the Beloved Laura*': and beneath this: '*To-day Is the Birthday Of The Graces And of Friendship.*' These two inscriptions had been painted by little Rochon. Then we

went to hear a High Mass which I have attended every year at this time, in honour of my Patron Saint. When I got back I found my children, M. Puy, M. Emengard, Madame Emengard, Adolphe, and – Lovely, and they gave me bouquets of the most beautiful flowers which they had had sent from Montereau so as not to rob my flower-beds. Léon and Alfred then both recited a little address of welcome. There followed tears, embraces and acknowledgments, and we all sat down to dinner. The day passed most pleasantly and in the evening, having thanked everybody, I went to bed, very far from expecting what was to happen on the morrow.

"On the next day, the Sunday, which was yesterday morning, no sooner had I got back from Mass, than amid the incessant pealing of bells and firing of guns I received a deputation to invite me to come down to the drawing-room where I found the ladies Emengard, M. le Curé, M. Emengard, M. Crou, and my entire family. After salutations all round I was asked to permit the villagers to come into the outer courtyard. Bells pealed, guns were let off and drums beaten, and suddenly there appeared a troupe of girls dressed all in white and another of young men, with ribbons in their hats and round their arms, marching in step with Charles at their head in the capacity of drum-major. In the middle of each troupe, four of the tallest carried on their shoulders an orange tree covered with flowers almost as fine as M. Puy's, and hung with ribbons, wreaths and mottoes. At a signal from the drum-major, each of the young women advanced, and with not at all a bad curtsy, placed a lovely bunch of flowers in my hands. Some of them in addition to their bunch of flowers, brought pears and apricots in baskets, and one, knowing how fond I am of

flowers, brought me a rose tree. Two of the girls recited some verses, and the girls' orange tree was placed at my feet. Then came the youths. At their head was little Rochon who recited a short speech excellently composed by the Curé. They filed past me one by one and came to lay their offering before me, a fine orange tree exactly like that of the girls. This is the best account I can give you, but what I cannot describe was the real warmth of heart that they put into it all. With every bouquet they gave me, there were loud cries of 'Vive la Duchesse,' hats in the air, all the girls weeping, taking my hands and kissing them whether I would or no, shouting just as loud as the boys, who found it equally hard to restrain themselves, for they wept too. 'Dear Duchess, you must get well,' they cried. 'You must make her well,' they shouted to M. Crou: and dear good M. Crou was himself quite overcome and wept like the rest of them. As for me, if I live a thousand years, this recollection will never fade from my memory. My heart was full and all those with me, even *Madame Emengard*, were melted to tears. These good people's feelings were perfectly genuine. M. Puy and M. Emengard, who know them well, said to me: 'You have worked a miracle; you have made them grateful.'

"I invited them to come and dance at the Château in the evening, and when I had made a list of those who had come in the morning, I sent word that all the rest could dance in the farmyard from four o'clock onwards. I thought then that all was over, but not at all. As we were sitting at dessert a troupe of eight or ten girls and as many boys came up to the dining-room windows and sang a song which was of *their own composition*: yes, really, but they were so excited that they kept on breaking into it with shouts of, 'Vive la

Duchesse.' At last they came to an end, and I had wine sent out to them. Then their shouts redoubled, and grew louder still when I came to the window and, after having thanked them for all their expressions of affection, raised my glass and cried: 'To the health and happiness of all the inhabitants of Champigny!' Then they were beside themselves and their joy, their ecstasy was such, that they nearly set fire to themselves with some small fireworks they had got from Sens. And all this, if you please, was entirely spontaneous: no one had told them anything except that the Duchess's birthday was on the 10th. Later on they danced and everything went off admirably. It was perhaps better than last year, no doubt because they are more civilized.

"My dear, Annette is just leaving – so I am pressed, but she will give you details that I have no time to write down. Good-bye, you will get another letter from me by Wednesday's post.

"Good-bye, my dear, why were you not with me? That would have been the best birthday of all.

"CHAMPIGNY. *August* 21*st*.

"It certainly never entered my head, when I was so touched by your peasants' expression of regard for me that their demonstrations could be a cause of distress to me. Yet it is so, for you must be aware that your displeasure at this is enough to plunge me in despair. I must say, in my own defence, they did everything on their own initiative and, to avoid it, I should have had to leave Champigny. Your failure to reply to my letter in which I told you all about it, and to all the messages I sent by Annette, make it quite clear that the whole thing annoyed you. I shall not waste time in pointing out to you how ridiculous this is of

you: you, who have so much good sense and judgment! I would also like to think that it was any other reason that prevented you from writing. I expect to be in Paris in about a week. I am sure you will not be glad to see me, for people who are in the wrong become more unpleasant than ever. I am not in any way in the wrong. You spend your life in making me weep and suffer, and I spend mine in loving you. But my heart is content: good-bye.

"You know I have asked you not to visit M. Decaze more often than a person of consideration should visit the Minister of Police. I do not mind about him, but I dislike his sister and you know it. You are always attracted by, and you always visit, people I do not like: my friends are nothing to you. The creature is certainly charming, she has such dignified and elegant manners that I would advise you to fall a victim: in fact everything about her except her name is quite perfect. Although I am far away from you I know everything you are doing.

The situation became rapidly untenable. Here is a letter from Maurice's steward.

CHAMPIGNY. *October 30th*, 1816.

"SIR,

"I have the honour to make known to you that the measure is full and that we cannot hold out here against the daily claims of the creditors.

"Madame la Duchesse must put an end to this state of affairs and must be good enough to withdraw her family and her household.[1] We are in want of everything, and we give the impression of living on public charity. I am truly ashamed of the situation. Soon we shall not dare to go out

[1] Laura had left Champigny three weeks before.

into the village or the surrounding country. You must allow me to retire to my room and live in seclusion. I cannot otherwise provide myself with the means of subsistence.

"No letter from Madame[1] for six weeks.

"I have the honour to be your humble servant,

"PUY."

Until this Laura had managed to keep going, and it is quite clear that Maurice was ignorant of the real state of affairs. At last, however, at the end of her resources, she borrowed . . . a thousand francs, in a semi-formal letter, intended no doubt to be seen by the terrible M. Puy.

"PARIS. *October 15th*, 1816.

"As my children are at your house, Monsieur le Marquis, and I should like to send them some money, I beg you to be kind enough to instruct M. Puy your steward to advance them a thousand francs on my account.

"I have just written to M. Crozat to say that the application for the payment of this sum should be addressed to me.

"With affectionate regards,

"L. DE P. DUCHESSE D'ABRANTÈS."

These thousand francs set the machine in motion. Maurice's fortune was almost entirely consumed in a magnificent display of fireworks that lasted four years.

From that time Maurice, who now understood the position, paid everything that his mistress wanted: and she wanted a great deal. Life went on more gaily than ever.

After her return to Paris, Laura rented a house from Madame de Kercado.

[1] Maurice's sister – joint-owner of Champigny with her brother.

"Good-bye, my beloved one. I am in the Rue St. Lazare. Send your answer there – No. 53, you know. By the way send me a small pattern of your carpet: I think I have found something.

"Good-bye. In haste: a thousand kisses.

"Madame de Kercado and I are on excellent terms. She came to see me and before she had got beyond the door she said: 'Madame la Duchesse, please do not think I came about that foolish business, or I will not come in.' I brought her to the fire and she spoke so kindly and warmly. She added that since I was her tenant she wanted to cultivate my acquaintance. 'We have met in society,' she added, 'and for the future I hope you will let me know personally if there is anything you want. If you want any partition-walls added or taken away, you must please do just as you like. Indeed she seemed so extremely amiable that she entirely won my heart. When you write to her you might say that I am not a young and handsome youth whose conquest she might find agreeable but that none the less my heart is entirely at her service. She really is a delightful creature and I hope this winter to follow up the advances she has made to me."

Moreover, why be depressed, when distress is so universal?

"How slow all these negotiations are! Really, in these days, one is astonished to find anyone in possession of a louis. The distress is universal. No one is exempt. M. le Duc d'Esclignac's furniture was sold the other week by order of the Court. The day before yesterday I saw some bills, of the value of eighteen thousand francs, protested though they bore the signature of L. de Tarente, Prince de

la Tremouille. Semonville, the keeper of the Seals, owes my lawyer a bill of four thousand francs which he cannot pay. My lawyer has lately been with his colleague Fournier-Verneuil to advise the old Dufour woman, whose estate is worth three millions. The state of indebtedness in that establishment is such that M. Fournier was obliged to get up at seven in the morning and go out and shoot a rabbit if he wanted any luncheon. Everyone is in the same state, but the distress among the people is the most dreadful of all. Every day there is a queue of fifty outside the bakers' shops and even so they cannot all get bread. What will become of us! I have received an answer from M. de Savary, Comte de Lancaulme: it is by this latter title that he is now generally known. His eldest son has married Mademoiselle de Clermont Tonnere. I enclose his reply, or at least the gist of it: you will notice that it is very much to the point.

"Good-bye, my dear. Your valise will be sent off to-morrow with everything you asked for. Good-bye: I embrace you with all my heart's love, and you know how entirely it is yours.

Laura's two sons, who had returned from Champigny, added at the bottom of the letter in their school-boy scrawl:

"DEAR MAURICE, we have arrived and are very well. We embrace you and love you very much.

"LÉON AND ALFRED D'ABRANTÈS."

"*January* 12*th*, 1817.

"How could you suppose that *I* could forget any concern of yours, and a commission with which you have entrusted me. *I* who curse Heaven every day because my wretched affairs have prevented my spending the winter in your

company and providing you at least with some amusement, for I think I may flatter myself that I am quite as entertaining as the manœuvres of M. de Guibert. I have not seen Geoffrey for two months. In the process of disentangling my affairs his conduct has appeared in so discreditable a light as to be beyond all excuse. In two years he has got through 72,000 louis which he cannot possibly account for. I have insisted on his producing some accounts. X. . . has him continually on the run, but all our severity towards him does but discover some further abominations. What a man! I knew he was very unreliable, but I should never have thought him so devoid of heart and of honour as to rob the widow and orphan.

"You ask me if Paris is gay: I can't tell you, for I don't know. You ask me whom I see: always the same people, less often, perhaps, because we are some distance away.—Madame de Bréhan, Madame Doumerc, Madame d'Yne, her daughter, Madame de Noailles, Madame Demidoff, Madame Nariskin, Lady Louisa,[1] dear Lady Louisa who, by the way, has come back to spend the winter, accompanied by her great booby of a sister. And Madame de la Marlière, from whom I forward a Christmas present intended specially for you: a toothpick made from a bird's claw.

"Among the men are General Hulot, his brother, Forbin, and M. de Maussion. He, by the way, said exactly what I expected he would one day when he came to see me.

" 'Ah, you think you're the only one! What about a lady in a pink hat who was with him alone at the Ambigu-Comique this summer?'

" 'Was she pretty?' I asked.

[1] Lady Erskine, who was at the time pursuing Maurice.

" 'Not so pretty as you. She had not your figure, your charm, she was not . . .'

" 'Wait a moment, Monsieur de Maussion, that lady was I. So please do not say unkind things about her.'

"You never saw anything so comic as the way his face fell. He would not believe me: and he only did so when I described his Tilbury and his new English outfit that he had just brought back from London. Then his vanity was touched and he did believe me.

"Cherval is very well: also Montbreton and M. Doumerc. As for Montron, his way of thinking is so unpleasant that since we went out together, a little while ago, he has not been to see me again. His insolent behaviour to Madame de Bréhan forced me to speak my mind to him. She is my friend: she is highly respected in society and I have to insist that in my house she must be treated as she deserves: I am sure that you will agree with me. Colbert is always the same good fellow, always in love and always someone's victim: he is the laughing-stock of Paris. It is sad that a man of honour and intelligence can be made such a fool of, and let himself be ruined by a woman who has nothing to lose by playing *her* part.

"Girardin is still on his travels: since the evening when you saw him at the Hôtel de Bréteuil he has only been in Paris twice and then only for twenty-four hours. He is getting as fat as a barrel: when he is as old as his brother Stanislas he will be double his size. I saw M. Clary yesterday and he asked me to give you his best respects. He is dining with me next Thursday. I want to ask your advice on a matter: and it is this. A man of forty-five, short, with a hide like a porpoise, bad teeth, red eyes, tolerably intelligent, and fairly honest, a native of Caen, where their methods are

pretty direct, as is proved by what follows, has taken into his head to write me the enclosed letter. You can imagine the effect it had on me, but when I had thought it over I realized that I must not take it seriously, and that I must say nothing about it but treat the man even more formally, perhaps, and more distantly than before. I met the fellow when I was saying good-bye to Geouffre: he was deputy-magistrate at Vire and he seemed an exception to the usual type of pettifogging lawyer. But this rather alters the situation, and although I have no serious complaint to make of his behaviour, since I have had another letter in the same style, I thought of that excellent judgment and unerring tact that is so characteristic of you. Turn the matter over carefully in your mind and tell me what you think: you can give me the best advice. Ought I to send the man away (he is not in my house – I don't mean that), or should I dismiss the whole silly affair: but if I do, I am afraid our relations will always be awkward. I will abide by what you say.

"I foresaw what has taken place and I tried to warn him by saying one day in the course of conversation, how much I loved you and how deeply you deserved my love. This did not discourage him – he is really hardly sane. There are, in fact, two ways of looking at the affair – as an insult or a joke, but in any case it is equally unpleasant.

"I have discovered a very notable means of economizing in my household. I have made an arrangement with an excellent restaurant-keeper at a fixed price of 30 francs a day. For that I get four entrées, four side dishes, soup, game, roast and bread. The dessert and wine I have here. We are five at table every day – Blanche, Adeline, Annette, Joseph and Balthazar, and there is still enough for three people to invite themselves to dinner. So you see there are no cook's

wages, no wood, no coal, no pilfering, no kitchenmaids, no waste, – all paid and done with. If there are one or two extra – I mean five in all (for I can have three more without any difficulty), I let him know an hour in advance, and all is arranged. Don't you think this is admirable?

"Good-bye, my dearest, my only love, my one treasure. I have received a letter from London in which I am offered 75,000 francs for the seven pictures that are there, not including the rare editions which were also sent.

"Good-bye, my beloved angel. Good-bye. Alas! When shall we meet again? If you really wanted me I could come except for my beastly affairs that hold me back. By the way, you ask me what I am doing. I stay at home a good deal in the evening and in the morning I dash about on business, but morning and evening I think of you and nothing but you.

"Bardin[1] has drawn two of the loveliest little Lancers in the world for my album, shouting 'Vive le Roi!' It is a charming little drawing."

Laura was trying to rescue some fragments from the wreck of her fortunes: her early youth had been passed under the Directory and the miracle of the exchange and its profits still dazzled her. We have before us a voluminous document in which all her 'gold mines' are set out in detail. 'I have been cheated all my life,' she wrote later.

"I have with me at present someone who offers me thirty thousand francs for an annuity of 10%. The person in question is a woman of fifty-seven, with cancer, and given up by the doctors. Indeed it is obvious she cannot live.

[1] Bardin, once A.D.C. to Junot, drew very nicely, says Laura in her Memoirs.

Write and authorize me to take this up: it is excellent business and there is not a moment to lose! The poor woman is dying and cannot last two years. Answer by return. I will see the woman, if necessary. It is a gold-mine if we can bring it off, and it depends on you. The proposal was made to me but I prefer you should have the advantage of it."

Laura aimed higher: strong in the support of Metternich she embarked on some dubious negotiations involving the recovery of a debt from . . . the Pope. She wasted her time and her money, or rather Maurice's money, and lost a good deal of her remaining reputation over the business.

She undertook a journey to Italy at the beginning of July 1817: on the 9th she was at Lausanne: on the 11th at Arona.

'ARONA. *July 11th.*

'I travelled as fast as I could, and stopped nowhere – a most tedious and fatiguing journey, owing to the mountainous country and the dreadful state of the roads throughout Switzerland and part of the way over the Simplon; "and here I am about twenty miles from Milan, unable to get forward, and you will never guess why.

' "You know, my dear Maurice, that I left Paris with a passport from the Ministry of Police and from the Foreign Office. M. Decaze wished to issue me a passport personally, which is, generally speaking, a favour, and M. de Reyneval, instead of signing it, had it signed by M. le Duc de Richelieu, from whom I have, in addition, a strong letter of recommendation to M. de Blacas.

' "And now something has happened which it was impossible to foresee. An insolent stupid Austrian official,

whom I will take care is made to pay for his conduct, calmly told me that as my passport was not viséd by the Austrian Minister in Paris, he could not let me pass. You, with your never-failing good sense, will realize how ridiculous such an attitude is, but since I could not drive over the fellow, I have come back to Arona and sent a letter to my banker asking him to go to the Governor and get me a permit. The messenger has been gone for 25 hours now and has not yet returned. I expect him every minute, but in any case I shall not be able to start for Milan until to-morrow morning. That is two days lost and all for nothing. All the lovely scenery I see before me cannot dispel my annoyance at this. To have hurried and wearied myself like this, for the privilege of wasting 48 hours in a detestable wayside inn, simply because my passport was not viséd by the Austrian Minister! I did not get the visas of the Resident of Geneva, and the Ministers of Switzerland and Sardinia: yet I pass through these countries and I was not stopped.

' "As I was at Lake Maggiore, I thought that I would at least take advantage of my misadventure: so I went to see the Borromean Isles. I thought the shores of the lake were one of the most beautiful sights I had ever seen, but I am far from sharing the excessive enthusiasm of those who regard the Islands as unique.

' "The Isola Bella, – the original one was built on piles and submerged, – is nothing but a dull heap of stones piled up on each other, a castle built in no recognizable style, neither unique nor Gothic, containing a few pictures of which the best is not worth fifty louis. I except a Perugino, though it does not belong to his best period. The garden, which is a victory of human effort like the rest, perhaps more so, since the little soil to be found on the island was

carried here on men's backs, is not in any way attractive. In a very small space there are ten levels one above the other, or rather ten terraces edged with borders of box cut into the semblance of ladies in hoop skirts, opening their mouths to yawn and wearing plumed hats, or shepherdesses, or some other odd figures of the kind. The only objects worth looking at are two laurel trees, or rather one, for the two twin trunks spring from the same root. These trees are commonly very fine in Italy, but these here are particularly so. They are nine feet in circumference and consequently three in diameter. When on his way to Marengo the Emperor stopped at Milan and visited the Borromean Islands. He carved the word 'Battaglia' on the bigger tree. Since then the growth of the bark has almost effaced the letters but they are still quite legible. The gardener who took me round said to me, 'Si e coronato dalioro avanti la victoria' [*sic*]. It is not uncommon in Italy to find a man of the people talking in quite a poetic strain.

' "Yesterday when I arrived I had all the trouble in the world to silence a serenader who was singing under my windows in my honour.

' "I may perhaps say that all that was being said about Napoleon and all that followed therefrom, is untrue. He is regretted nowhere, neither here nor in Switzerland. They certainly do not like the Austrians, but they do not like him any better. Prince Eugène made himself very unpopular in his latter days. He behaved with a severity which was very ill-timed. I questioned many people on the subject: the feeling is unanimous and we may trust it, for it is the voice of the people.

' "To return to my Islands; I have told you about the two laurel trees which are truly magnificent. The second notable

feature is a group of about fifty orange and lemon trees growing out in the open, but as the winter is not like that in Portugal they have to be covered up. So portable hot-houses have to be constructed. Some of the orange trees reach a height of twenty-five feet. Their up-keep alone costs twenty-five thousand francs. The Comte Borromées [*sic*], who owns and governs the Islands, makes good use of his wealth. He helps the inhabitants of all the Islands, especially the Island Dei Pescatori, so called because its sole inhabitants follow this calling: indeed but for him they would have neither food nor clothing.

' "Here is my messenger returned. He has brought me an order from the Lieutenant-General of Police at Milan which will rather put a certain Police Inspector's nose out of joint. And yet, apparently not: for it seems that the man's orders applied to all foreigners without exception. This seems a good way to attract them to Italy. I will congratulate Metternich on it when I see him.

' "I will not seal my letter till I get to Milan, which I shall do after dinner.

' "Here I am at Milan, Maurice dear. It is a fine town, but after all those magnificent landscapes, everything else, and everything that tries to look like Paris, is worthless in my eyes. They tell me there are fine buildings here. I know, and shall know, nothing about them for I am leaving at five in the morning and sleeping at Padua.

' "I am going to have a bath this evening and then go to bed.

' "Good-bye, my dear Maurice, you see that I devote to you all my free moments. Ah, my dear, be sure that there is no one loves you more than your Laura.

' "Good-bye. I have sent the bill back to M. Puy. By the way, certain things I am much attached to have been left out of my box:

' "(1) a bracelet of coloured stones inscribed with your name and containing a lock of your hair. I don't imagine you want to give it to someone – I believe you incapable of an act so . . . I won't say what!

' "(2) Eight or ten rings given me by the Duchesse de Ragusa, Madame Lallemand, you, de Montbreton, etc. . . .

' "(3) A necklace of fine pearls and rubies given me by the Princess Borghèse at Aix.

' "(4) A small phial for vinegar to be worn round the neck, set with a small turquoise and a ruby, given to me as a New Year's present by Montron last year.

' "Why have these objects been kept back? Really M. Puy's conduct is abominable. I do not hesitate to use the word. I hear that Metternich is still in Italy and is to stay some time. I am glad to hear it, because my business promises well.

' "Good-bye, my friend. Think of me and rely on my very affectionate friendship." '

On the 15th she reached Florence. At Rome the affair came to nothing.

Laura pretends that a very wealthy prince made a proposal of marriage to her during her stay in the Eternal City. She refused him: 'I had,' she says, 'at that time other matters in my mind, and even in my heart. I was contemplating marrying again.'

Prince Ra. . . was a Sicilian: he possessed *annuities* amounting to four hundred thousand lire. During a former visit to Paris, he had tried to marry the traitor Moreau's widow, who was then known as Madame la Maréchale. Repulsed in this quarter, the Prince turned his attention to the Abrantès family, if we may judge from this letter from Laura, dating from the previous winter.

"I saw M. de Maussion the other day. He says he has a great regard for you and I believe it is true, so I bestow a little of my friendship on him. We played a game of billiards and instead of playing for sweets we played for a box at the theatre, which I won. So we went to the Variétés where we laughed so much all the way through (Madame Demidoff, M. de Maussion, Général Hulot, Clothilde, Adolphe[1] and I), that we agreed we must often play for a stake of this kind. When we got back I won another box from M. Hulot for 'Robert le Diable,' at Franconi's to-morrow. They say it is the finest performance that has ever been done. And I won another from the Prince for the day after to-morrow. As for the Prince I wonder if he still wants to be in love with me. Joking apart, his behaviour towards me is not very creditable. I know very well that Clothilde's demeanour rather invites such attempts, but at the same time to want to seduce a young woman who must be assumed to be innocent is scarcely princely behaviour. As for me, you have long known what I think of it, and I fancy you share my opinion. I am in a very delicate situation. What can I do? Everyone knows that she is the niece of the Duc d'Abrantès and my niece also. If she once leaves my house she is lost. Her relations at Cambrai will never do anything for her. They

[1] Adolphe de Maussion: his brother's name was Alfred.

give her a few distant hopes, but nothing now, and I am quite fond of her. She looks after me. My daughter is away and she takes her place. But let us hope that all this will turn out for the best and not think too much about it."

Chapter XIX

LAURA came back from Italy and her creditors bore down on her.

With a fine and distinguished sense of honour and an unselfishness that belong to another age, Maurice paid, and paid again: that fortune 'which, combined with his high birth, placed him in the front rank,' was gradually melting away. . . . One fine day he, too, had to face the storm.

"What do you mean by talking about selling your estates? You cannot have so low an opinion of my honour and delicacy.

"You say you have to make up your mind. Good Heavens! Before I see you do that I would rather die of grief. That would not help you much, you will say, but since one does not do that except in the last extremity, it should be enough to reassure you that nothing will be done that may make you apprehensive. Good-bye, my dear: do not worry. Sleep in peace."

Champigny was sold.

"O my dear, I, I whose life is yours, I who would shed all my blood for you without asking why, could *I* be the cause of an anxiety that will not let you rest? O God! Why did I not die before I was weak enough to tell him about my affairs. He would not then have helped me, he would still have been what he was, and I should not have become hateful in his eyes. O Maurice, I see it all too clearly: that is the true reason for your coldness, and the ending of your love for me, unhappy creature that I am!

"Good-bye: my poor head is aching and my hand shakes so that I can hardly write."

Maurice could do no more. Laura held him fast and would not be shaken off.

"Perhaps you believe that you can break with me, but you are mistaken. Five years of so close an intimacy have given me rights that I will not give up without a fight except in the event of your marriage. I have sworn to leave you free in that case and I will keep my word. Until then, you must not wound a heart that loves you always, in spite of these continual scenes. All Paris knows of our liaison, and I myself have been too proud of my love for you not to let it be known that it was the inspiration of my life. I should go and claim you on the steps of the throne if you were there. You must not torture me or my love for you. Let us avoid these scenes which cannot be pleasant for either of us – still less so for you."

The Duchesse d'Abrantès finally got into a 'financial difficulty' which was something worse than unpleasant; the melancholy documents lie before us as we write.

"I think that since we have been so long and so openly involved, it is really a question of self-respect for you to prove your regard for me (I ask no more than this). You may spare yourself the trouble of telling everybody that I am mad to think that you will marry me. I may be very impulsive, but I am not stupid, and, unless I was, knowing our respective positions, and having regard to my four children, I could hardly think of such a thing. I would not deny that it would be happiness undreamed of, but I swear on the Gospels that the idea has never entered my head. Many people who saw me at your house thought so, but I have never given them any grounds for their opinion. So,

to come back to our present business, Maurice, you may imagine how I must feel when I see men and women of the first rank, whom I had not seen for months and even years, come to my house to show their regard for me, whereas you, who have spent your life with me for the last five years, do not come near me. What do you think the world says? That you, who know me as well as I know myself, have found me guilty and left me to my fate. I know very well that your sister, your brother-in-law and all their circle, will perhaps tell you that it is *honourable* to abandon a friend of five years' standing who is in trouble, but you know that your sister never liked me, and I fancy that, on this occasion, she has not spared me, without even knowing the rights and wrongs of the case. I forgive her, because she is your sister, and therefore sacred to me. You have been very dear to me, Maurice, and at this moment, when I am trying to take an unprejudiced view of our position, I am not afraid to tell you that you are, and always will be, equally dear to me."

At last the rupture came. . . . The two lovers had so often used the word that they could hardly believe the thing possible.

"I never loved anyone truly and completely, with a love that comes only once in one's life, except you. Your power over me was so immense that nothing could prevail against it. If you had asked for my life to satisfy a caprice I would have sacrificed it without hesitation.

"Do not let us begin all over again explanations that are disagreeable to both of us and especially painful to me. Our relation has taught me this at least – that in love as in friendship the word interest must never be uttered; better

to break off at the first refusal than run the risk of asking twice. My dear Maurice, all that you and your sister have to say on this subject will convince no one. I have spent my life being cheated: I have never cheated a soul. If, since my husband's death, I had dreaded to embark on such a life, I should have set about it very differently. My heart is bruised and has long been so: I never concealed it from you, and as I never hid my love I shall not hide my sorrow.

"You have pretended to have reason to complain of me during our last interviews in Paris. I am certainly very much attached to the person you mention, but not in the way you suggest. I noticed in him many good, kind, and honourable qualities, and especially, devotion to the interests of those to whom he is attached: I am ready to admit that his attentions are and have been inspired by a deeper feeling than friendship, but his kindness and his assiduity have deserved my friendship, my sincere friendship, and have won it. You may make what observations you like on the matter: unless they are in accordance with what I have just told you they will be unjust. What interest have I in deceiving you? None whatever. I am quite well aware how you think of me, and that you have come to hate me. Why?

"Your conduct towards me for the last three months has been a matter for reproach. You need not urge that I have done you wrong. *I have not and I would not.* You may say what you please. Anything can, I know, be turned into a jest: a whole romance can be founded on a perfectly simple situation: For instance, it is easy to say of a man who has been kind and thoughtful to a woman during an illness that nearly proved fatal, and at a time when she is being perse-

cuted by an unjust world, – if she becomes attached to him out of gratitude and friendship, it is easy to say that he is her lover and that she is in love with him. Some people will only admit that one relation can exist between a man and woman. When you saw me, I was certainly distressed, very much so: but if this had been due to causes that you would have been only too glad to discover, I would not have let you notice it: I would not have put us both in a so very ridiculous and humiliating a position. Even if a man has ceased to love a woman he always presents a sorry spectacle when a confidence of this kind is bestowed on him. The person in question has shown me more marks of friendship (that is the right word) than you could possibly know of. I could tell you them and they would not astonish you, for honour and courage are deeply rooted in his nature. So I was very much upset on hearing that he might think that all this kindness had been rewarded by the blackest ingratitude and betrayal. I have long had friends for times of joy and happiness: and I have long been foolish enough to think them friends. Experience has undeceived me: I must now take care not to wound, even unintentionally, those whom Heaven has sent to me at a time of sorrow and suffering. I say once more that any other interpretation you put upon the matter is false. My passion for you has extinguished all else in my heart. I have loved more deeply than God, no doubt, permits. He has punished me for it and punished me cruelly.

"Good-bye, my dear Maurice; if you read your letter over again, you will think it very unkind. However, I do not believe that when you wrote you meant to wound my feelings again. A blow from you is always harder than any other, just as the joy that you have given me is greater than

any I can ever know. You may be sure that you are my first and only love.

"It is a bitter truth to have to face, after the end of a *liaison* that began when I was beautiful, young, rich, and surrounded with everything that could make life happy, and when I have sacrificed my best years to an affection which you would never believe, probably because your 'time for love' had not yet come; but at least I thought you might love your daughter's mother just a little. But no. I am speaking of that little angel, happier than me, whom it soothes my mind to think of. My honour, and my sense of what is due to me, bid me do everything to prove that I do not deserve the reputation of which your complaints accuse me: they may be deserved, but they are not less painful at a time when my daughters are thinking of marriage.

"I thank you for my picture. I am surprised that you have not sent it back before. When one sets so little store on things of the kind, they should be allowed to go back into the possession of those who know how to value them and who, I hope at least, will never part with them.

"Good-bye. Don't think I resented my dismissal, since I had asked for it: love and its attendant caprices have departed. But I was again distressed to find that there was not even some friendship left. Surely you would not give up your sister's portrait on so slender a pretext?

"You may be sure I shall keep the promise I have given you. If I cannot quite manage the exact day, you must put it down to my unlucky star which influences everything that happens to me.

"I send you back *your ring*: you know that mine are still on my fingers. I told you that even a new and sacred bond

could not make me take them off, so you may judge what I thought of your request."

Comte Edgar de Balincourt gives a summary of Laura's life between 1820 and 1835.

"The illusions of youth disappeared: relations became embittered, and the separation took place. The Duchess accepted it with resignation and gratitude, and my father for his part displayed much generosity, and refused to enter his just claims against those of the other creditors.

"He lost part of his fortune, but he satisfied the chivalrous side of his character. His conduct caused a good deal of surprise, but when he married he was fortunate enough to find in my mother[1] a mind noble enough to appreciate what others had thought merely quixotic.

"The Duchesse d'Abrantès went into a modest retirement,[2] and literary friendships gradually replaced her social ties: it was no sacrifice, for among her friends were Chateaubriand, Victor Hugo and Balzac. The latter persuaded her to write her Memoirs. . . . She was no more economical in her straitened circumstances than she had been when she was better off."

[1] Maurice married Euphrosine de Lisleroy.

"The contract was signed on Feb. 4th, 1824, at the Tuileries Palace, in the presence, and with the approval of His Majesty, and by all the Princes and Princesses of the Royal Family. The Duchesse de Berry, who was at Rosny, intimated that she wished to sign on the following Sunday."

[2] Before finally returning to Paris, Laura settled at Orgeval for two years, then at Versailles, which she only left when she fell in with Balzac, according to M. Turquan. (Note by Comte Edgar de Balincourt.)

Years went by. Maurice, faithful to his engagements to the Bourbons, would not serve the House of Orléans. He had had a brilliant career; Lieut.-Colonel at the age of twenty-eight, he resigned his commission.

'For ten years,' says the Vicomte d'Arlincourt, 'he had been the Darling of the Muses, the Prince of the Fairy Tale, and the Favourite of Destiny.'

One day he received the following letter:[1]

"Will you recognize my handwriting, my dear Maurice, after so long? If you knew how touched and happy I was to see you once more! I asked you to come back but you did not come. Why not? It is true that I am working hard, but I always have an hour set apart for my friends, and that is when I sit down to my dinner. Those who are still fond of me, are kind enough to forget that I am no longer wife of the Governor of Paris, and are as glad to eat a wing of chicken with me as I am to give it to them. Will you come on Sunday? A friend of yours will be there who was moved to tears of joy on hearing that I had seen you again. If you come to see me before that, come between two and four o'clock, or in the evening, because for the next eight or ten days I am engaged in reading some documents or having them read to me, and this, as you saw the day you came, takes up the two hours in the later afternoon. I am nearly always alone with my family to whom I have devoted myself for many years. We have now reached a period, my dear Maurice, when the friendship that ought

[1] The handwriting of the last letters has become almost illegible: no punctuation, no spaces between the words, each line slopes downwards towards the end. The deterioration is doubtless due to her enforced literary activities.

MAURICE DE BALINCOURT

From a portrait in the possession of the Marquis de Balincourt

to exist between two people who have been to each other what we were, becomes a moral obligation; otherwise we should have bad hearts, and I am sure that is not true of either of us. Good-bye; I hope to see you soon: now that you have discarded the foolish frozen mantle that enveloped your regard for me, I hope it will not reappear.

"Good-bye, good-bye, my dear Maurice.

"LAURA D'A."

"The performance[1] has been postponed because the actors, who are numerous, did not know my piece very well: and as, in my capacity as directress of the theatre, I wanted everything to go smoothly, I asked for this postponement, but it will not be longer than this because I myself won't have any performance after the Thursday before Good Friday.

"I have not yet got the tickets! But you may rely on them. I had told Joséphine to get them, but she is thinking of nothing but herself just at present: and yesterday I thought the tickets were here.

"Do you remember when her nurse told me that she said to her sister that she thought it more suitable for you to love her than me? Queer little soul!

"I view my literary successes with indifference, but I am

[1] Laura managed the theatre which Comte Jules de Castellane had had built in the garden attached to his house. It was an amateur theatre and friends were invited to the performances.

"Madame Ancelot was invited. 'It was a piece in one act by the Duchesse d'Abrantès, the performance of which lasted for five hours; it was so packed with surprises and stories and amusing episodes which had nothing to do with the play. The Duchesse d'Abrantès, especially, was extremely gay, and we spent a most amusing evening. To end up with we danced in the small theatre.' "

not at all indifferent to the impression I make on the minds and hearts of those I love! I feel I enjoy a literary triumph twice over, when a friend says to me: 'I read this or that with pleasure': and you are among the small number of persons that I think of in this way, my dear Maurice. That is the result of the feelings that haunted us for so many years. We loved each other deeply!

"Do you know why I am saying all this? It is because yesterday *someone* was speaking of you, and saying how strange it was that I was still attached to you. I do not find it at all strange, because I am attached in the way I was to my brother, and since I have lost him, you have taken his place.

"Good-bye. This is all very serious for the prologue to a comedy.

"Good-bye. All my sincerest regards.

"L. D'A."

"You will find in the volumes that are about to appear passages that will appeal to your heart though they may hurt your modesty, but as they come from a friend you must not mind."

Laura is now a woman of letters who lives by her pen. She is unrecognizable. Her charms have disappeared and the daily struggle has given her something of a masculine air. She still lives well, and like her mother Palormia keeps up appearances and gives parties. The little silver spoons are taken out of pawn for one evening. The 'poor little vessel' of days gone by was tossed from wave to wave, that is to say, from the clutches of one bailiff into those of another. The horde of creditors bore down on her and hemmed her in, and wrung her poor possessions from her

one by one. This existence killed her; she fell, and rose again only to fall once more.

In June 1838, worn out, she collapsed like a wounded bird.

'Don't speak to me of a life like that,' she wrote to her daughter; 'I must get out of it or throw myself into the river. If only I can find a few francs to-day I shall be able to rest to-morrow. O my child, my child!'

The following is M. Turquan's account of her death.

'Jaundice declared itself. The creditors soon heard of it. They settled like a flock of crows on the corpse while it was still breathing, and alive enough to hear them seize upon and value, in her own house, the wreckage of her poor belongings. The unhappy woman, lying in her bed, the only possession left to her, was frozen to her very marrow, and in the evening she who, since her childhood, had never been without company, lay alone in her empty room, alone, and dying. The servant came and had her taken to a hospital in the Rue de Chaillot. Payment in advance was asked for, and as this was not forthcoming, the Duchess was turned into the street. A more hospitable establishment in the Rue des Batailles finally took her. The very name seems prophetic.'

On June 8th Maurice received the following letter:

"I wanted to be the first, my dear Maurice, to tell you the dreadful news. It is a disaster that I could not let you hear of it in some indifferent and casual way. No doubt you already understand me and will realize that I am speaking of my mother.

"We lost her yesterday at four in the morning. She

hardly had time to feel any pain. The complaint from which she had been suffering for a month past seemed quite on the mend: she was talking of nothing else but getting up and what she could eat, and yesterday night she was dead!

"It is one of those blows for which there can be no consolation. However bitter has been my fate until to-day, I see that the cruellest blow of all was yet to come. My poor mother!

"Yet she is not the most to be pitied: God has been pleased to make her life so bitter that it would perhaps be selfish to ask why she is no longer with us. But we, her children and her friends, what can console us for having lost her?

"There is no consolation for such a sorrow: we can but wait until it shall please God to unite us once more.

"I need not tell you that I count on your kind and constant friendship on this sad occasion. To-morrow Saturday, the 11th, we shall be paying our last respects to her. I am sure I shall find you there. We shall leave the house where she died, No. 70 Grande Rue de Chaillot, at 11.30 precisely. Till to-morrow.

"Good-bye: my heart seems quite broken.

"NAPOLEON D'ABRANTÈS."

He received some other letters too.

'Dear kind soul, I cannot tell you how touched I was by your letter, it was good of you to send the money. The Queen has been kindness itself – you would not believe how she helped the poor Duchess. I hoped that something would be done for the children . . . "between ourselves, quite between ourselves, I think we shall miss the poor woman more than they will: they have almost forgotten her

– don't repeat this: and yet don't you remember how she spoiled them? Someone ought to write to M. de Metternich and see what comes of it. . . . I like you for being so little like the rest of the world at such a moment.

"C. L.

"Did I say anything about M. de Custine? He must be feeling pretty remorseful."

"And the Duchess of Otranto concluded her long letter of condolence with these words:

" 'It is not your fault, my dear Marquis, that she fell into this state of misery; in days gone by you did what you could – *and more* – to save her.' "

Epilogue

It is related that old Lefebvre, Duc de Dantzig, on hearing of the death of his only son, the famous 'Coco,' who had fallen on the field of honour, cried out with relief:

'I am glad to hear it: I was afraid he might not make a good death.'

Junot would never have known such a fear. He had called his last-born Rodrigue, and though his Christian name was changed later on, the youth always had a touch of Classic grandeur. . . .

"Laura wrote to Maurice: 'I showed where your name was written in your letter and the handsomest of my children kissed it a thousand times.' "

Little Rodrigue adored him.

He went into the army, – noblesse oblige! On June 24th, 1859, the day of Solferino, Lieut.-Colonel Junot, Duc d'Abrantès and last of his house, fell on the battlefield, in the hour of final victory, under the reign of a Napoleon. The son accepted with equanimity the soldier's death, which his father had faced so often and with such indifference.

He was carried to Brescia: the town was full of troops and wounded. It was summer. The wild frenzy of songs and shouts of which the Italians are so prodigal rose up from the warm earth. Lying there on his straw pallet Colonel Junot felt he was dying and, like his mother, dying alone. . . .

The agony was prolonged.

So he asked that a young officer of the Guard, whose name had struck him, might be brought in: it was a Balincourt.

'Are you really Maurice's son?' he asked.

And as the young dragoon nodded silently, too much moved to speak:

'Tell me about him.'

Edgar de Balincourt described his father's life near Avignon, where he had now retired from the world, doing good, redressing wrongs, always chivalrous, an example to everyone.

'Is he as handsome as ever?'

'They say he has hardly changed.'

'Go on, I am still listening to you: but hold my hand in yours,' said Colonel Junot: 'you won't leave me . . . until afterwards, will you?'

And as the same names call up the same images, it was his dazzling childhood and Laura's unquiet shade that passed before his still open eyes, while Maurice's son was speaking. . . .

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